Missouri Muse

The value of a book

By Perry Stone

Last week Ashley, my 14-year-old daughter, noticed several of my books were signed. "Wow, these are autographed! Are they going to be worth something?" she asked.

"They're worth a lot to me right now," I told her.

"Can I have them when you die?" Her excitement was quite apparent.

"If you promise to read them."

"You're not going to die tomorrow; let me think about," she said.

"Ok, but if I do die tomorrow, they go to someone who will read and enjoy them."

"You won't know, if you're dead." She smiled.

"Believe me--I'll know!"

"Maybe I'll read them before you die."

"THAT would be even better."

In retrospect, what I wanted my daughter to understand is the value of a book shouldn’t be decided by dead authors and ancient history, though they are in many cases. A ten cent book found at the flea market can be as valuable as a $39 book from Barnes and Noble. You can spend hundreds of dollars going to a theme park for an afternoon. It’s worth every penny. Actually, to lose yourself in a good book is just as enjoyable and worthy of the same price—though I am ecstatic most novels and stories are much much cheaper.

What I didn’t say Sunday is that feelings are a precious human commodity. A friend, a loved one, a pet, or a book that finds a place in your heart; these are all invaluable, to be cherished forever. Throughout life other things will become known and added to each individual’s list of worth beyond monetary value.

Parents and writers have more in common than children’s books. Parent’s misconstrued conversations with their children could fill a book, or at least a family album, especially since misinterpretation becomes more frequent during the teen years. Screwed If Misconstrued—the Parent and Writer’s lot in life.

Of course writers have the best of the deal; they can edit before their words go public. Parents only have one shot at it. In retrospect, I wished I had or I wished I could have said it better or said it differently. Bless you and yours, Coach

Paw Joe
Meandering with Madonna
Finger Reading

By Madonna Dries Christensen

Most of us probably don’t recall learning to read, unless we had difficulty. If you watch a child who is learning to read, he often uses his finger as a guide, word by word. He will eventually drop using that tool. For children with visual impairment, the fingers are essential. Katy Brzakala teaches Braille in Central Wisconsin. I asked her to tell us about the process.

MDC: What led you to teaching Braille?
KB: When I was in high school, I did a lot of babysitting. One of the families had a new baby during the time I was caring for their other children. He was born blind. I’d always known that I wanted to teach, but upon meeting this little boy, it became clear that I wanted to teach children with visual impairments.

MDC: Please briefly describe Braille.
KB: Braille consists of 6-dot cells. Each cell stands for a letter, group of letters, or mark of composition or punctuation. The configuration and location of the dots tells readers which symbol they are reading. Braille readers lightly brush their eight fingertips across the cells to read. Writing Braille has several options. One can hand punch the dots using a small, pointed stylus. This is the least cumbersome method. The most common choice is a Perkins Brailletype, a 9-key Braille typewriter. The third common method is an embosser, a Braille printer that can attach to a computer or mobile Brailletype.

MDC: What’s the biggest challenge in your teaching?
KB: We live in a world driven by the visual. If you think about street signs, restroom signs, diagrams, graphs, pictures, drawings, and even the simplicity of color, you’ll see that we rely on sight for just about everything. The biggest challenge is teaching my students how to adapt to a visual world. Imagine grocery shopping with a blindfold on. How would you know the 2% from the skim milk? Would you be able to comfortably cross a busy street with your eyes closed? These children must learn skills to gain confidence and remain safe and independent.

MDC: Early intervention is beneficial to children with developmental difficulties. At what age are they introduced to Braille?
KB: We start teaching Braille at the same time that print begins to be taught. We introduce students to their name in Braille at the preschool age and begin the rest of the alphabet after that. The hope is always that Braille reading students are on track with their sighted peers.

MDC: Some parents of children with learning disabilities feel that mainstreaming into regular classrooms is important. Do your students attend regular classes, and do you advocate mainstreaming?
KB: I believe there is a right placement for every child. Most of my students are completely or partially mainstreamed. I think it’s important to include students with visual impairments in the general curriculum as much as they can handle. There are other placements that may be more
appropriate for some students, such as resource rooms, special education programs, and schools for the blind. It’s up to the IEP team (teachers, parents, other school personnel, and the student where appropriate) to decide what is right for the child.

MDC: To help us understand how many children are affected by visual impairment, how many students do you have, and in what size area?
KB: I teach in four school districts and have about 20 students. I work with students with all severities of impairment and all grade levels.

MDC: Are Braille children’s books readily available for purchase?
KB: Unfortunately, a Braille reader can’t walk into a local Barnes and Noble and purchase books in Braille. There are, however, a plethora of resources available to provide Braille books. There are volunteer organizations and publishing houses throughout the United States that produce these books. The Library of Congress and other local public libraries carry books in Braille that are available for loan. The books are shipped as Free Matter for the Blind so that no cost is incurred by the library patron receiving and returning books.

MDC: Thanks, Katy. You’re a blessing to your students.

Writing Braille has several options. One can hand punch the dots using a small, pointed stylus. This is the least cumbersome method. Katie Fritz is pictured using the most common choice, the Perkins Brailler, a 9-key Braille typewriter. The third common method is an embosser, a Braille printer that can attach to a computer or mobile Braillewriter.

“The writer has everything in common with the vaudeville magician except this: The writer must be taken in by his own tricks. Otherwise, the audience will begin to yawn and snicker. Having practiced more or less incessantly for five, ten, fifteen, or twenty years, knowing that the trunk has a false bottom and the opera hat a false top, with the white doves in a cage ready to be handed to him from the wings and his clothing full of unusual, deep pockets containing odd playing cards and colored scarves knotted together and not knotted together and the American flag, he must begin by pleasing himself. His mouth must be the first mouth that drops open in surprise, in wonder, as (presto chango!) the character’s heartache is dragged squirming from his inside coat pocket, and that character’s future has become his past while he was not looking.”

“The writer as illusionist”
William Maxwell
Writing the Journey:
Ten Tips to Create Vivid Travel Diaries
By Dave Fox
A well-written travel diary can be your greatest souvenir. Many people struggle, however, to capture the full spirit of their journeys. For some, their journals seem like bland, step-by-step accounts of their days. Others simply can’t find time to write in the middle of an exciting trip.

Journaling doesn’t have to gobble up precious vacation time though. When done well, it can enhance your travels and bring you more deeply in touch with your experiences. Follow these tips and watch your words come alive:

1) **Write fast.** One of the greatest mistakes beginning journalers make is trying to create their best writing as they travel. There isn’t enough time. Think of your diary as a place to collect as many memories as possible. Spill your thoughts and impressions onto the paper quickly. Don't try to be organized. Don't try to write well. You’ll be amazed how much detail you can splash onto the page in a 15-minute writing blast if you just go for it. You might not end up with your greatest writing ever, but when you go back to read your journal one, five, or 20 years later, your diaries will contain far more memories than if you had labored over every word.

2) **Be selective.** Rather than trying to document everything that happens in your day, pick a few key moments. “I woke up and had breakfast,” for example, is something you probably do every day, so skip it. Instead, choose one to three highlights each day and cover them in detail.

3) **Be descriptive.** Follow the old adage, “Show, don’t tell.” Here’s an example: People cruise the fjords of Norway and write, “The fjords are beautiful.” Well, duh! This is not a news flash. The fjords have been beautiful for thousands of years. We know they’ll be beautiful before we ever see them. Avoid empty adjectives like “beautiful,” or “incredible.” Paint a picture with your words instead. Write about the dark granite cliffs that plunge into icy, turquoise waters; the scruffy, maroon farmhouses that freckle the land; seagulls that squawk as they chase your boat; the engine sounds and diesel fumes that intrude upon this pristine nature. Descriptions like this will help you remember the details of your experiences – and if you share your journals with others, it helps them picture where you’ve been.

4) **Scan your senses.** Different senses are dominant in different situations. Gazing at a rainbow, listening to a symphony, swimming in the ocean, or eating a gooey slice of chocolate cake each evoke a different dominant sense. Often, however, our less dominant senses contain hidden stories. Walking through a spice market in Istanbul, my sense of smell was most profound. But when I paid attention to what I was **hearing,** I found a powerful story. The Muslim call to prayer bellowed from a mosque across the street. Meanwhile, Madonna’s latest CD was blaring from a spice vendor’s boombox. These two sounds together created a powerful image of modern Turkey – a mix of traditional Islamic ways and a desire among many Turks to Westernize.

5) **Journal in your mind.** As you go about your day, make mental notes of things to write about later. You won’t have time to write down everything that comes to mind, but when you do sit down to write, you’ll
already have a sense of what you want to cover. Your writing will flow more easily. In addition, paying attention to your different senses and the subtle details around you as you explore will bring you more intimately in touch with your surroundings.

6) **Weave together your “outer” and “inner” journeys.** Don’t just focus on what’s happening around you. Write about what’s happening within you too. Travel evokes new insights and emotions. Use your surroundings as a backdrop for self-discovery, and write about the thoughts and feelings that arise as you explore.

7) **Try “theme journaling.”** Choose a different topic each day. It can be anything: transportation, children, language barriers, toilets, food, clothes, money, music, accommodations, other tourists, etc. Write about that topic within the context of your entire trip, not just an individual day. You can also write a “people journal.” Choose one person you’ve encountered each day and write about him or her. It might be someone you had a three hour chat with, but it could also be someone who spent 20 seconds selling you a bus ticket, or a random stranger on the street who caught your attention for some reason. Describe everything about them: How they looked and talked, their mannerisms, and so on. And don’t forget your inner journey. How did this person make you feel, and why?

8) **Write someplace fun.** There’s nothing worse than being cooped up in a hotel room when you want to be out experiencing things. Surround yourself with local culture while you write – in a café, pub, park, or museum. You can take this a step further and write a “verbal snapshot,” a live report of everything happening around you in that moment.

9) **Caption your photos.** Most people rely on photography to document their journeys. It’s quicker than writing. There is so much a camera can’t capture, however – sounds and smells, stories people tell us, challenges we face, and our own emotions. Often, photographs tell only part of the story. A great thing about digital cameras though is we can review the pictures we’ve taken on the spot. So pick a favorite photo each day and write about what was happening around you and what was going through your mind as you took it. Note the photo’s file number in your journal so you remember later which picture you were writing about. You can also leave space in your diary to paste a printed photo later.

10) **Rewrite!** Your time to write while traveling is limited, but once you’re home, you have plenty of time to hone your rough draft journals into polished stories. This is a fun way to relive your experiences after a journey. Take all of that wonderful, messy scrawl you threw onto your pages while traveling, choose your favorite excerpts, and turn them into travel tales you can share with others.

Our vacations might be short, but trips are investments in memories that we get to keep for the rest of our lives. We accumulate stories and knowledge as we travel, but our memories can grow fuzzy over time. Writing about your experiences as you travel will keep your memories strong for years to come.

*Dave Fox is the author of Globejotting: How to Write Extraordinary Travel Journals, and the founder of Globejotter Tours, a company specializing in international adventures with travel writing classes along the way. His next creative writing tour visits Vietnam in October. He also plans to offer a Botswana writing safari in 2011. For more information, visit www.GlobejotterTours.com.*

Editor’s note to other editors: Dave says you can reprint this article, free of charge, in any publication or online format as long as you credit the author and include the complete bio. Dave would appreciate tear sheets, which you can mail to him at 8720 Phinney Ave. N #14, Seattle, WA 98103 or email a pdf file to dave@davefox.org.
Last issue I asked you to tell me about the most [fill in the blank] book you’ve ever read. Here are a few of your responses.

**Blatty blows Monette’s mind**
I’d call a book I read when I was 13 “mind-blowing” – because of how it’s stayed with me all these years, but also for the changes it instilled in me. I think I started to stop believing in the Christian God when I read this. Also, it is the first time I tackled writing a movie script, by adapting this book, and then I contacted the author to ask that he consider reading my script and making the movie. He wrote back but unfortunately said he’d already made it into a script. The movie, when I finally saw it, was a huge disappointment. The book was called *Twinkle Twinkle Killer Kane*,
the author was William Peter Blatty (*The Exorcist*), and the movie was called *The Ninth Configuration*. My movie, if it ever gets made, is called *Only Gods Go to Mars*. Check this book out – if you dare! Thanks for the question! And the newsletter!

_Monette Bebow-Reinhard_
Author, *Mystic Fire*

**Cameron is life-changing for Diane**
Dear Marshall,
My most life changing book is *The Artist’s Way* by Jane Cameron.
Thanks for *Extra Innings*!
All the best,
Dianne

_Dianne Morr_

**LeHane prompts an OMG! from Carol**
My most OMG(!) book is Dennis LeHane's *Shutter Island*. I got it when it first came out, read it, and didn't understand the ending. Then I flipped back to the beginning, read the first few paragraphs again and went "Oh my God!" It was brilliantly written and brilliantly twisted (and despite the brilliance of director Martin Scorsese, I heard the "surprise" ending is so foreshadowed it's impossible to miss. That's too bad. And further proof that some things work better in books than in film!).

_Carol Hornung_

**Jim relives gut-wrenching war in *Matterhorn***
*Matterhorn, A Novel of the Vietnam War* is one of the most gut-wrenching, emotion-shredding books I have read, probably because of where I was when the Gulf of Tonkin incident was announced by President Johnson.

My story began on August 2, 1964, a little after sundown. I was a brand new first lieutenant barely recovered from my white sidewall haircut. A bunch of us were sitting on bleachers at the end of a week-long mock assault on the aggressor unit’s position. Two or three majors were pacing in front of us, conferring with the sergeants who had walked like Gods among our trenches. We were noisily waiting for the critique of our assault.

Finally, one of the majors called out in his command voice, “At ease, Gentlemen.” Respectfully, we grew quiet.

“President Johnson has asked Congress to pass a resolution that will likely determine the immediate future of each of you officers.” the major announced.

That Congressional act came to be known as the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which served as legal justification for deploying US conventional forces and the commencement of open warfare against North Vietnam. The announcement brought a chill for those of us on the bleachers at the edge of Camp A. P. Hill in Virginia. It put an end to our trivial conversations. 
Matterhorn is getting a lot of attention these days. I saw it listed in TIME magazine, and it appeared in the list of recommendations that the e-bookstore had for me. I downloaded this novel onto my Kindle. I read a little, put it aside, and come back again, wondering how the guys will do in First Platoon, Bravo Company. One reviewer of the book said, “The dialog is crisp and realistic, the characters are vivid and complex.”

Yep. It’s true. I like the “kids” and I can’t stand them. I applaud their endurance, and I cuss their slovenly ways. I tremble with them, but I don’t run with them. They think nothing can hurt them. Each of them hopes that he is the one who will endure, that he will survive. But you and I know that what is to happen is already written. No prayer is going to change a damn thing for those guys in Bravo Company on that mountain called Matterhorn in Vietnam. I’ll find out their fate with them as I move on into the story, reading and watching.

It is a grueling story.

Signs of the times
Over a gynecologist's office: "Dr. Jones, at your cervix."
At a proctologist's door: "To expedite your visit, please back in."
On a plumber's truck: "We repair what your husband fixed."
On another plumber's truck: "Don't sleep with a drip. Call your plumber...."
On a church billboard: "7 days without God makes one weak."
At a tire shop in Milwaukee: "Invite us to your next blowout."
At a towing company: "We don't charge an arm and a leg. We want tows."
On an electrician's truck: "Let us remove your shorts."
At an optometrist's office: "If you don't see what you're looking for, you've come to the right place."
On a fence: "Salesmen welcome! Dog food is expensive!"

Thanks to Larry Tobin

Extra Innings
Skipping around the May Pole
with writers, their enablers,
and those who'd rather garden

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Editor-in-Coach: Marshall J. Cook
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Feature writer: Dave Fox
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Book Reviewer: Carol Hornung
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Write by the Lake
The Writers Institute
The Rhinelander School of the Arts
Weekend with your Novel
and the Odyssey Project
No added sugar, honey. No carbs, no trans fats, no salt-- pretty tasteless all in all.
Like its predecessor, Creativity Connection, this newsletter contains your recommended daily dose of nouns, verbs (transigent and intransigent), gourds, adjectives, adverbs and other artificial sweeteners, pronouns, antinouns, prepositions, propositions, conjunctions, contradictions, contractions, eruditions, bloviation, chiasmus, charisma, metanoia, paranoia, trace metaphors and the occasional half-witticism.
E.I. Book Review

Oscar knows when to comfort the dying

*Making Rounds with Oscar,*
by David Dosa, M.D.

Reviewed by Carol Hornung

Oscar knows when people are going to die. This nursing home cat, a black and white tabby, roams the halls of the dementia care unit he calls home, and when he curls up on a patient’s bed, the staff know that within 24 hours that patient will die. An intriguing feline interest story, but is there any truth to it?

Dr. David Dosa took up the challenge, turning Oscar’s story into an essay, and then a book, *Making Rounds with Oscar.*

Mary, the day shift nurse at Steere House, in Rhode Island, had already witnessed Oscar’s behavior. Dr. Dosa, telling the story from his point of view, is skeptical, suggesting it’s just coincidence, or the cat senses the change in routine, but he decided to investigate.

Throughout the book he interviews the families of Steere House patients who died in Oscar’s presence. At the same time, he begins paying more attention to Oscar’s behavior with the current patients.

The stories that come up are amazing. Oscar hops on the bed of a patient who seemed destined to die soon, then hops back down, instead taking up residence on another patient’s bed, one who seemed to be fine. Within a day, the first patient improved, while the second one passed away.

In another case, two patients were dying at the same time. One patient had family around the bedside, the other had no one. Oscar stayed with the second patient until he died, then joined the family with their vigil until that patient, too, passed away.

All of the people Dr. Dosa interviewed were glad Oscar was with them and their loved ones at the end, but no one could explain why the cat did what he did.

The story is told in first person, with many scenes recreated from interviews, and it reads much like a novel as Dr. Dosa explores Oscars’ mysterious talent. He discusses the stress of dementia and the toll it takes on everyone in the family. There’s an important section, too, on accepting the inevitable progression of dementia and deciding when to stop medical intervention and focus on the comfort of the patient, allowing nature to take its course.

By the end of the book, Dr. Dosa has a likely theory about how Oscar can sense the impending death of a patient -- he’s probably able to pick up the scent of decaying cells. But why Oscar chooses to stay with the dying, providing such comfort to both patients and their families -- that’s a question only the cat himself can answer.

Carol Hornung lives in Madison with her dog (sorry, no cats), husband, and two kids, and is a regular visitor to Sebring’s Memory Care Unit where her 97 year old grandmother lives.
Coach’s picks for May

Get on board with Mess

“He feared the back nine of his life would mirror the front nine but with more wrinkles and less stamina. Life was getting stale. All of his ex-wives, ex-bosses, ex-girlfriends, bar friends, gambling and drinking days were starting to blend together. Hopelessness settled over Mess like a fog creeping over the Gulf of Mexico.”


“Mess” Minton (nobody’s called him Lester in years) is going nowhere slowly when Bob Carson deftly picks him up, shakes him silly, and puts him down on a roller coaster that might kill him or, worse, drop him neck deep in commitment.

Here are Mess and Shirley meeting cute on their first ‘date’:

She popped the small piece of muffin into her mouth, pointed at Mess with her index finger and gave a bright smile. Playfully, she began to pepper him with quick questions.

“Do you go to church?”

“Not religiously.”

“Medical issues?”

“Nothing major.”

“Computer savvy?”

“Not really.”

“Type.”

“O-negative.”

“No, no.” She wiggled her fingers. “Type?”

“Yes.”

Mess put his palm up and his head down. They stopped and laughed easily.

*I love this novel! I’ve been reading*

Bob’s great pieces on minor league baseball for years but didn’t know what to expect from his first attempt at book-length fiction. I needn’t have worried.

There’s nothing minor league about the laughter and pure joy Carson delivers. He writes wonderful dialogue and has the wisdom to get out of its way and let it carry the story to its illogical conclusion. Pick up this novel and read the first couple of pages. Bet you won’t want to put it down.

Bob, a long-time friend, started publishing an annual baseball guide called *Minor Trips*, a marvelous guide to every minor league team, in 1991. He writes for dozens of national magazines, including *Trot Magazine* and The United States Trotting Association. He lives in Strongsville, Ohio with wife Sue and daughter Katie.

You can read all about Bob and Mess at [www.rkcarson.com/Books](http://www.rkcarson.com/Books) and order this great read from [minortrips@aol.com](mailto:minortrips@aol.com). He’ll need your postal address and $16, which includes shipping.

**Willie Loman rides again**

“I have tried to save my own life with the truest story I could tell, even if I had to imagine or make up most of it. So be it. There is so little we can ever know of someone else’s life. Even if they are your parents. Even if she is your wife.”


This is a marvelous coming of age novel by Milwaukee author C.J. Hribal, written from the point of view of one of seven children born to Wally Czabeck and his more-than-long-suffering wife, who’s mostly referred to as “our mother.” Wally’s a salesman, out there on a shoestring, quick with a joke, a smile, and a cliche for any occasion. He’s also a drunk.

If Wally is a cross between Ralph Cramden and Willie Loman, that would make narrator Emil (called Em or Emmie) son Biff -- a comparison he categorically rejects.

The Czabecks begin married life by getting hitched on a horrid television show in 1952, just the first of a string of Wally’s get-rich-schemes -- the most disastrous of which is the purchase of a falling-down farm in Wisconsin. As the family dances on the brink of chaos and dissolution, we gain insight into the fates of the seven kids, who all grow up troubled. They’ve managed to log four divorces by the time the tribe gathers for their parents’ 50th anniversary -- and to discuss what to do with their parents, who are fading -- and Em’s marriage to Dorie is shaky.

*By chronicling the fate of this proud family, Hriba gives us insight into 50 years of the American dream.*

Like the Lomans of Arthur Miller’s great play, *Death of a Salesman*, the Czabecks don’t count for much. They’re little people, and, like most of us, they live and die without the world taking much note. But attention must be paid, and Hribal turns their lives into another American epic.

This great novel is available through all the usual outlets.
The Writer’s Life
Plan B
by Randi Lynn Mrvos
I admit that I worry about the little things (‘don’t sweat the small stuff’ doesn’t apply to me). So when my engine light came on in my car, I freaked. What’s wrong with it? Should I drive it? When could I get in for service? How long will it take to fix?

A few days later when I brought my car to the dealership, I was told that I’d need a new catalytic converter. It would take several hours to fix. I had brought plenty of books, snacks, and paper and pen for writing, in anticipation that I might be there for a while. But when the service technician checked on the part, it wasn’t in stock. So switch to Plan B. Schedule a weekend appointment and pick up the car four hours later.

Now I had time to squeeze in a workout and do some writing. When I sat down at the computer later that day, I acknowledged that switching to Plan B occasionally comes into play when conflicts crop up. But Plan B should always come into play when submitting manuscripts.

I write educational children’s pieces which require hours of research; I also have to get expert reviews. Inevitably, I receive rejections. But I don’t wait long to find a place for these wonderful “homeless” articles. I initiate Plan B.

I revisit the online market survey provided by The Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators. Could I have overlooked a publication to submit my article? I check www.kidmagwriters.com. Has a new listing been posted? I look over my publication credits. Could there be a market that I failed to consider?

After deciding on a magazine, I check to see if the publication has a theme list. If so, I decide if my piece is suitable. Next, I read the writers’ guidelines. Lastly, I read some back issues online or at the library. I ask myself: Will I have to change the tone of the piece from casual to formal? Will I need to add quotes, bullets, or sidebars? Will I need to supply photos or provide an expert review?

Sometimes, I have to either shorten or lengthen the piece. Lengthening it may require doing more research. Shortening it may involve tighter editing. I may need to change the vocabulary to aim it at a different age group. I’ll use Children's Writer's Word Book by Alijandra Mogilner, published by Writer's Digest Books, to find appropriate words. I will run the article through a Curriculum-Based Assessment Reading Probes like Okapi to make sure that it’s at the correct grade level.

I work hard on my articles. I’m proud of them and want to share them with parents and children. Rejection won’t get in my way. I’m determined to find a market for them. Whatever it takes, I’ll strive to make my article worthy of the next publication. I may worry about the small stuff; but I put my worries aside when it comes to finding a home for my manuscripts. And if that takes Plan B, so be it.

Kids today!
Thanks to Perry Stone
1. You spend the first two years of their life teaching them to walk and talk. Then you spend the next 16 telling them to sit down and shut up.
2. Grandchildren are God's reward for not killing your own children.
3. Mothers of teens now know why some animals eat their young.
4. Children seldom misquote you. In fact, they usually repeat word for word what you shouldn't have said.
5. The main purpose of holding children's parties is to remind yourself that there are children more awful than your own.
6. We childproofed our homes, but they are still getting in.
7. IF YOU HAVE A LOT OF TENSION AND YOU GET A HEADACHE, DO WHAT IT SAYS ON THE ASPIRIN BOTTLE: "TAKE TWO ASPIRIN" AND "KEEP AWAY FROM CHILDREN"!!!!!
Coach’s Bullpen Briefs

Fitzgerald’s Martian Mash enmeshes Hollywood

Pat Fitzgerald, our favorite Bob Dylan/Tom Russell/Billy the Kid maven, is a finalist in the big Hollywood Table Read My Screenplay Contest. [http://www.tablereadmyscreenplay.com/#]

“I was especially surprised because I forgot that I had entered!” Pat admits.

The finalists are chosen solely on the basis of a logline (one sentence capturing the essence of the story). “Since I’d rather yank out my teeth with a pliers than write loglines, I had decided to challenge myself and see if I could create something halfway decent,” Pat says.

“Apparently, I did better than halfway.”

Here’s the better-than-halfway-decent logline for “Millard Does The Martian Mash”: A bumbling Earth man must travel into outer space to rescue an abducted hometown gal, a feat he can’t accomplish without the aid of an alien--who arrived on Earth to assassinate him.

Burris essay dons a skirt

Barbara Burris has had her breakthrough as a freelancer, publishing her essay, “When I Grow Up,” in Skirt! magazine. She admits she got anxious waiting for the contract from the editors.

“I know how to react in a corporate business situations,” she notes, “but I’m still timid about approaching editors with questions or demands.” But after Coach’s one-session on-line seminar and pep talk on approaching editors, she was fine.

“I took a 6,000 word piece and wrote a 3,500 word piece and then did a take off from it to 1,000 words,” she says, “and guess which one sold! Of course it was the shorty.”

You can check it out at skirt.com.

Type that url carefully!

Carolyn Leonard learned her craft the right way-- as a rural newspaper editor. (Nobody works harder than a rural newspaper editor.) It paid off for her in recent publication of her nonfiction book, Who’s Your Daddy? A Guide to Genealogy from Start to Finish. If you go hunting for it online, she warns, be sure to type in the word “BOOK” in your search. If you don’t, at least get all the children and squeamish partners and maybe even the dogs out of the room first. You’ll get a porn site, definitely not related to Carolyn’s book.

Okay, now that you’ve checked out the porn site, go to [www.CarolynBLeonard.com](http://www.CarolynBLeonard.com) and enjoy her great, G-rated website. If you ask nicely-- or just email and type “SUBSCRIBE” in the subject line, You’ll start receiving her online newsletter, WritersReminder, right away.

Carolyn lives in Oklahoma City with her husband, Jon Heavener, a retired engineer, and their pampered Boston Terrier, Shiloh. She still operates the wheat farm in northwestern Oklahoma where she grew up.

Carolyn Howard-Johnson will be a featured speaker at the Wisconsin Regional Writers Association Conference in Madison, Wisconsin, in the fall of 2010. Find information on that at [www.wrwa.net](http://www.wrwa.net). This active group invites writers from everywhere to join. Find their blog at wrwaoonline.blogspot.com.

You can teach an old horse new tricks

Patti Huber has a story, “Never too old: a first horse, finally, at 53,” in the April issue of Horse & Rider, in their “Your Stories” feature.

“ar reader gains her grandmother’s blessing,” Patti summarizes, “and fulfills a lifelong dream at the age of 53.”

Patti rode this very horse at the Midwest Horse Fair in Madison recently, “proving,” she says, “that horses and humans are never too old to learn new things.”

Patti is a full-time instructor with the Communication and Performing Arts Department at Madison Area Technical College, where she’s currently teaching online speech classes and coaching the speech team. She plays EQUI-SOCKETTM with Harmony Horsemanship at Freedom Stables in Deerfield, WI. She has two adult children, both married, and a husband “who puts up with my obsession for horses.”

Everson’s Fact or Fool depicts college romance

Rosemary Hovey Everson announces publication of her novel, Fact or Fool (Lulu), available from Amazon, Barnes and Noble.com, and Global.com. Price is $18.04. “The novel is based on a college friendship and romance,” she tells us, plus a “mystery masquerader.”
Letter to the Bullpen

Young, framed writer claims independence from others’ expectations

Morning Marshall,
Thank you for the kind words at the close of my article in Extra Innings #6. My ever supportive wife insists on framing my first published article. When I objected she retorted that I framed the e-mail from Barack Obama on Nov. 4 thanking me for working on his presidential campaign, and in her mind the article was more important personally. So it will be framed.

On Thursday this week I'll turn 59, and two articles in Extra Innings #6 resonated with me. The first was on Chaim Potok's view on retiring. I am retired from a career with the University of Wisconsin-Madison and, as he notes, that timeframe was dictated. I concur with Potok that "Writing doesn't dictate a time frame," and I find that liberating. I have no concept of ever retiring from writing because it is a part of me that gets me up every morning, whereas a career was just that - a career, something I did, not part of me.

The second article that resonated with me was by Carolyn Howard-Johnson. In part it struck a chord because I'm turning 59. However, the journey she has taken is much more important and instructive. In December 2009 I was re-organized out of my position with a local non-profit organization. That had never happened to me before. While in shock for several weeks, I also saw an opportunity. I've been working on a novel off and on - mostly off - for nine years and it was 95% complete. Without the constraints of an 8-5 job, I decided to finish the book and work to get it published.

By mid-February I had finished the book and completed four re-drafts. I'm now in search of a publisher and or agent. I have one agent in New York reading my manuscript.

I too spent most of my adult life fulfilling expectations I had mistakingly thought were my own. I am through with that now.

Rex

Rex Owen

Ask The Coach

“You should NEVER do that,” he asked

Ed Downs wants to know:
Using the ? mark..I like to quote a character's question by saying 'he said' rather than 'he asked.'
ex: "Can you get it done," he said.
Technically, it's wrong, which is no big deal, but it also might be distracting. Personally, I'd avoid it unless you want to do it on specific occasions for a specific reaction. However, if you can get your dialogue to work anything like Robert Parker’s while using ‘said,’ as he does, go for it!
When I want to emphasize a word, like, ex: ‘well, it's easy for YOU to say.’ my editor zaps me about the all-caps. What do you think about underlining or italicizing?
Do so as little as possible. I always overdo and have to edit out a LOT of those (couldn't resist). Keep working the dialogue until the context (and especially the other character's response) makes it clear how the words are inflected without typographical tricks.
How Fights Start

Thanks to Sandy Mickelson

My wife sat down on the settee next to me as I was flipping channels. She asked, 'What's on TV?'

    I said, 'Dust.'

    And then the fight started...

My wife and I were watching "Who Wants To Be A Millionaire" while we were in bed. I turned to her and said, "Do you want to have sex?"

    "No," she answered.

    I then said, "Is that your final answer?"

    She didn't even look at me this time, simply saying, "Yes."

    So I said, "Then I'd like to phone a friend."

    And then the fight started....

Saturday morning I got up early, quietly dressed, made my lunch, and slipped quietly into the garage. I hooked up the boat up to the van, and proceeded to back out into a torrential downpour. The wind was blowing 50 mph, so I pulled back into the garage, turned on the radio, and discovered that the weather would be bad all day.

    I went back into the house, quietly undressed, and slipped back into bed. I cuddled up to my wife's back, now with a different anticipation, and whispered, "The weather out there is terrible."

    My loving wife of five years replied, "Can you believe my stupid husband is out fishing in that?"

    And that's how the fight started...

I rear-ended a car this morning. So, there we were alongside the road and slowly the other driver got out of his car. You know how sometimes you just get soooo stressed and little things just seem funny? Yeah, well I couldn't believe it.... He was a DWARF!!! He stormed over to my car, looked up at me, and shouted, "I AM NOT HAPPY!!!"

    So, I looked down at him and said, "Well, then which one are you?"

    And then the fight started.....

My wife was hinting about what she wanted for our upcoming anniversary. She said, 'I want something shiny that goes from 0 to 150 in about three seconds.'

    I bought her a bathroom scale.

    And then the fight started...

When I got home last night, my wife demanded that I take her some place expensive... so, I took her to a gas station.

    And then the fight started...

After retiring, I went to the Social Security office to apply for Social Security. The woman behind the counter asked me for my driver's License to verify my age. I looked in my pockets and realized I had left my wallet at home. I told the woman that I was very sorry, but I would have to go home and come back later.

    The woman said, 'Unbutton your shirt'. So I opened my shirt, revealing my curly silver hair. She said, 'That silver hair on your chest is proof enough for me,' and she processed my Social Security application.

    When I got home, I excitedly told my wife about my experience at the Social Security office.

    She said, 'You should have dropped your pants. You might have gotten disability, too.'

    And then the fight started...

My wife and I were sitting at a table at my school reunion, and I kept staring at a drunken lady swigging her drink as she sat alone at a nearby table.

    My wife asked, 'Do you know her?'

    'Yes,' I sighed, 'She's my old girlfriend. I understand she took to drinking right after we split up those many years ago, and I hear she hasn't been sober since."

    'My God!' says my wife, 'who would think a person could go on celebrating that long?'

    And then the fight started...

I took my wife to a restaurant. The waiter took my order first. "I'll have the steak, very rare, please," I said.

    He said, "Aren't you worried about the mad cow?"

    "Nah, she can order for herself."

    And then the fight started...

A woman was standing nude, looking in the bedroom mirror. She was not happy with what she saw and said to her husband, "I feel horrible; I look old, fat and ugly. I really need you to pay me a compliment."

    The husband replied, 'Your eyesight's damn near perfect.'

    And then the fight started....