In which we fly the flag and
  * Carrie T. Gruman-Trinkner reveals several things we might not know about Harper Lee (including her real first name),
  * Jim Herod tells how he became chairman of the (library) board,
  * Madonna Dries Christsensen invites big boys to remember their favorite little boy toys,
  * Perry Stone lines up the words with the pictures,
  * Mary Chace wants to know if this manuscript makes her look fat... and the proverbial much, much more.
By Carrie T. Gruman-Trinkner

I wanted to be Scout Finch. I spent my childhood climbing trees, exploring the woods around our hobby farm in central Wisconsin, and watching the people around me. I didn’t know how much my father knew, but sometimes, like Scout, I was treated to a glimpse of his brilliance.

What girl, reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* for the first time, doesn’t fall in love with the independent, tough kid whose innocence is crushed by the intolerance and injustices served in Alabama during the Civil Rights era? (Four years after publication, and three after the book won the Pulitzer Prize, the Civil Rights Act was finally passed.)

The novel, the only one Harper Lee has published, is indisputably a masterpiece--a book that can be read by children and adults and loved equally by each.

Lee, whose given name is Nelle Harper Lee (Nelle is her grandmother’s name spelled backwards), borrowed heavily from her own life growing up in the segregated city of Monroeville, Alabama. The surname of the family, Finch, was taken from her mother’s name (Frances Cunningham Finch Lee). Her father was a lawyer who defended a black man and his son, both hanged for the murder of a white store keeper.

Even Scout’s buddy Dill is based on a friendship of Nelle’s, that of Truman Capote, who grew up next door to the Lee’s but moved to New York City. He visited Alabama and spent his summers with the author. Their friendship eventually resulted in Lee accompanying Capote on his research for *In Cold Blood*.

The novel revolves around the motherless girl, Jean Louise “Scout” Finch, her brother Jem, and their incomparable father, Atticus (named for the friend of Cicero, Titus Pomponius Atticus--known as a wise, learned and humane man).

Atticus, a lawyer, is called upon to defend a black man accused of raping a “white trash” girl. The town is torn over the situation, and Scout watches the changing times from the vantage point of changing innocence. She and Jem learn, almost losing their lives in the process, that life is not always fair and man is not always just.

As writers, we can only hope to draw such multi-dimensional characters! Once we do, they will live and breathe in the minds of our readers long after the covers of the book are closed.

But don’t think that Nelle Harper Lee had an easy time with *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The novel took almost eight years to complete and two more to rewrite. At one point, she threw the manuscript out of her New York borough apartment into the snow and slush. Her editor talked her into rescuing it.

It is to our benefit that he did. The novel has sold over 13 million copies worldwide. Scout, Jem, Atticus, Dill and the others have given us lessons in love, family, tolerance and honor. Pick it up again, visit sleepy Macomb County, and step into one of the finest novels ever written.
From the Nethermost

 Interruptions for the Chairman of the (library) Board

By Jim Herod

I laughed the other morning as I braked to a stop in the middle of the street. Where else but in Grove Hill would I be flagged down by a hand holding a white handkerchief and protruding out the window of an approaching automobile? There are plenty of pickup trucks in Clarke County, so it could not have been my truck that alerted an eighty-nine year old friend that it was I who was approaching. Nevertheless, she recognized me hunched down in my white Toyota, stuck her hand out of her car window, and waved with a clear intent.

I greeted her as we pulled up side-by-side. “Good morning, Marion.”

“Good morning, Jim. I wanted to know if you and Kathleen are finished with writing for the grant.”

Ah, yes. Writing for the grant. Consider the agony of writing a grant for the Grove Hill Public Library. In the first place, what would I possibly allow to interfere with my meandering through The Nethermost and listening for whatever is there? What would I let disturb the solitary late afternoons and evenings when my fingers become a conduit for transferring to my computer The Where in which my characters argue, and laugh, and cry? Stop me in the hall at the Write-by-the-Lake conference and ask me what I allow to interfere with my writing. I’ll say what most any writer would say: family, finances, and food. Nothing else, I might insist. But that’d be a lie.

I have found that becoming isolated is not so easy. Because Grove Hill is a small town, nearly everyone knows that I am involved with the local book club and the writers’ group. Consequently, it is no surprise that I would be invited to serve on the Library Board and, with only six members on the Board, it is no surprise that I would eventually be asked to serve as Chairman.

Previously, as an ordinary member of the Board, about all I ever did was to second motions and respond affirmatively when it came time to vote. Being Chairman of the Board is different.

Surely this is the time for change, and hope, and audacity. What audacious hopes could I have for change in the Grove Hill Public Library? I didn’t find the answer down in The Nethermost. Rather the idea came gradually. I read that Graham Greene died and, later, that Barry Hannah died. One Friday night, NYU President, John Sexton, was on Bill Moyers’ Journal praising “Snow in August” by Pete Hamill. It was the most natural thing in the world for me to ask if our library had books by Graham Greene, or Barry Hannah, or Pete Hamill.

Our little library is not open on the weekend. Nevertheless, it did not seem appropriate to have to wait until Monday to find if these authors have books in our library. Why could we not have a public, on-line catalog so that the answer to such questions could be found from home? Having such a thing became the audacious hope that I have for change in the Grove Hill Public Library.

The rest of the Board agreed almost at once. Getting the librarians to agree has not been so easy. They like what is familiar. There had to be visits by vendors and calls to other small libraries already having on-line catalogs. Then, there was the agony of writing a grant proposal.

Funding agencies often specify formats for grant proposals. With many proposals to read, it is easier if they all have the same formats with Roman numerals, upper case letters, and lower case numbers all lined up. Ratings of applications for grants seem to be based, in part, on whether or not the formats are meticulously followed. Throw creativity to the trash.

My writing partner and I determined to follow guidelines: formatting pages, checking totals, and selecting high quality bond paper. I couldn’t resist some small deviation. Letters from townsfolk were not required, but I added one from the Mayor, one from the Executive Director of the Chamber of Commerce, and one consisting of remarks from the power readers of Grove Hill. In the last paragraph of this latter, I quoted one of the big time readers in Grove Hill. He wrote, “The library ought to go one step further and buy Jim
Herod a backpack. Then, he could get in his daily runs by delivering books all across town.”

There! That should do it! Surely, after reading the many grant proposals, all uniform in style and content, two lines of audacity will make the Grove Hill grant stand out. Maybe we’ll be funded on October 1.

If so, we will go live and on-line on October 3. Then, even from Madison, Wisconsin a reader will be able to check out the holdings for Barry Hannah in the Grove Hill Public Library.

The seventh draft of the grant proposal is written. I was telling Marion this as we sat in our vehicles in the middle of the street when I sensed movement behind me. Tom Dauphin was back there waiting patiently in his Ford Econovan. He didn’t blow his horn, race his engine, or shout obscenities out the window at two elderly citizens discussing library business in the middle of the street. Tom knows both of us. He wouldn’t think of acting up because old friends pause to talk. It was only a short interruption of his drive to up town Grove Hill. There, the coffee pot is always full. I was sure that when Tom and I sat together a few minutes later, each of us stirring powered cream into hot coffee, I would ask him if he has read anything written by Barry Hannah.

“Oh, yeah,” he’d say. “From over in Mississippi. Right?”

Word of mouth not worth the paper it’s written on
"What you don't see with your eyes, don't witness with your mouth." ~Jewish Proverb

"No one gossips about other people's secret virtues." ~Bertrand Russell, On Education,
"Do not repeat anything you will not sign your name to. ~Author Unknown
"The biggest liar in the world is 'They Say'." ~Douglas Malloch
"It is just as cowardly to judge an absent person as it is wicked to strike a defenseless one. Only the ignorant and narrow-minded gossip."--Lawrence Lovasik
"A gossip separates close friends." --The Bible (Proverbs 16:28)
Men asked to remember, write about their favorite little boy toys

Madonna Dries Christensen
Last year I published Dolls Remembered, an anthology of stories by women reminiscing about childhood dolls. Now it’s the men’s turn. Toys Remembered will be published late this year, featuring stories by men about their toys/playthings/games. Noel Barrett, a toy appraiser on Antiques Roadshow, has agreed to write the Forward.

Coach has already delivered a story to me. If you’re interested in submitting, here are some guidelines.

*Up to 1,500 words;
*Deadline September 30 (but before that would be appreciated).

Tell about a childhood toy/game/plaything that is memorable for some reason. Be creative; include details, use dialogue if possible. You probably don’t recall exactly what you or someone else said in a given situation, but in a memoir it’s okay to pull out your literary license and recreate what might have been said.

Try to include the following information:
*The time period;
*your approximate age,
*where you lived at the time.

How did you get it? Was it an unexpected gift? Did someone make it for you? Did you make it yourself? Find it? Save money to buy?

Do you still have it?

Did this toy lead to a career or hobby you still enjoy?

Conclude with a current bio, in third person.

As with my other books, I plan to self-publish and donate royalties to Down Syndrome Association of Northern Virginia. Therefore, I cannot monetarily compensate contributors. I ask for One Time Rights only. You retain copyright and all rights to the story. You may publish it elsewhere without my permission. At a later date, I might ask for photos.

Send in the body of an e-mail or by attachment to: iowagirl1@aol.com

Madonna Dries Christensen, Sarasota, Florida

Boys and their toys
Sibley, Iowa, 1946: From left, Jack Wilson, Danny Dries, Doug Gronewold, Doug Roben, Jim Wilson, and Larry Dries.

Coach’s Bullpen Brief

The working title

of my novel in progress used to be “The Kick of a Mule.” (Our Missouri Muse will understand what that means.) But lately I’ve been calling it “The Novel That’s Trying to Kill Me.”

You know how in a mystery, when somebody tries to kill the protagonist, you know he/she is getting close to the truth?

I sure hope that’s true of a novel, too.
By Perry Stone

Our beloved Coach told me years ago, for a small pittance, to concentrate on Subject, Focus, Slant and Attitude. To my amazement, my second photography lesson suggested picking your subject and focusing on details for the slant you wanted to convey. I don’t remember the lesson mentioning anything about Attitude. If it didn’t, it should have.

I have decided to go where this man had never gone before and become a photographer as well as a writer. While writing and photography may seem as different as night and day, the parallelisms are fascinating.

(For those, like me, who aren’t sure—I looked it up and parallelisms is actually a word.)

Writing and photography textbooks both recommend students should orbit a world they know. But others in each field urge students to seek new horizons, experiment and visit untried realms for their effort.

Of course, whether from galaxies of personal knowledge or the world of guesswork and lies, basically Planet of the Scribes begins with nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. From there it evolves into fact and fiction erupting with tone and attitude that relate a subject in the best light.

In photography (we are talking colored pictures here) you begin with the four basic colors -- red, green, orange, and yellow, mixing, adding or subtracting to achieve the perfect picture. And though much of this is done by chemical reaction inside the film, the photographer’s understanding and choice of light and lens are the equivalent to a writer’s choice of a multitude of ways to bring forth the best in story.

Both articles and pictures are brought to the public’s eye through the use of equipment and paraphernalia that can run into the thousands of dollars and do nothing to make a person a better scribe or picture taker. While, or maybe because, technology is forever changing how we photograph and write, you can be frugal in both fields.

A list of parallelisms’ for scribe and picture-maker includes enjoying the task while sharing the experience with others of the same interest. Standards of self-satisfaction grow higher with each accomplishment in both fields; and though it isn’t crucial that we be well versed in all aspects of writing or photography, the essence of each forces us to strive for the best results possible.

A story will, when successful, create an image in the mind of the reader. In the same respect, a picture will induce a verbal narration of beauty, humor, sadness or whatever. Writer or photographer each can begin their craft concentrating on subject, focus, slant and attitude. Then you take your finger and start poking letters or shutters. There’s nothing to do after that but to get better--and better. If the time frame of learning is also a parallelism--then I’m destined to be a photography student for at least the next decade. Bless you and Yours, Coach.

Paw Joe
Purdy, Missouri

Is this picture worth 1,000 words?
Small-town boy in the Internet Age

by Marshall J. Cook
Several years ago, I had the joy of writing a regular column for the *Pike River Community News*. It was a wonderful paper-- key word “community” -- completely local, personal, folksy, reflecting the loving kindness of its editor, Janice Kaat.

Actually, Janice was a whole lot more than editor. She was founder, funder, publisher, primary writer, photographer, janitor, layout and design department, chief finance officer, and IT consultant. She put her heart and soul as well as her money into that paper, and it showed.

My column was called “Small Town Boy in the Big City.” The small town was Altadena, California, where I grew up at the foot of the San Gabriel Mountains. The “Big City” was and is Madison, Wisconsin, where I moved with wife Ellen and son Jeremiah 31 years ago.

The “boy,” well, that was me. I was that barefoot lad with cheeks of tan (sunburn, actually) playing pick-up baseball all day in the summer, taking a break only to walk down to Salibee’s for a soda or one of those disgusting plastic tubes filled with cherry or grape guck. After you drained the guck, you could chew on the plastic tube for the rest of the day and pretend it was chaw, just like the big leaguers used.

I wrote about overcoming my terror and discovering the joys of winter in the Midwest, about how hard it was to order a cup of coffee in a cappuccino latte town, about getting used to the constant noise of living off of a big street.

And I wrote a lot about my growing up time in that little town in southern California (back when there were little towns in southern California). You can take the boy out of the small town, but, well, you know.

Jan let me write about whatever I wanted, which was part of the joy and the wonder of her newspaper for me.

When I’d get my copy of the new *News* each month, I always checked my own column first. (Do all writers do that?) But I read everything else in the paper, too, the recipes (especially the ones from Jan’s mom), the local color and gossip, the inspirational pieces, the captions to Jan’s great photos.

Although I never set foot in the community or dangled my toes in the Pike River, I got to feel as if I knew the place well and would one day go “home” to visit.

I was so sad when Jan had to fold the paper, sad for her, sad for the loss to the community, sad for myself because I knew I’d miss it.

Now I write a regular column called “Keep the Day Job” for Ned Burke’s fine online magazine, *The Perspiring Writer*. It’s another wonderful gig, and Ned’s another great editor to work with. I like the company I’m keeping there, too, especially Madonna Dries Christensen.

Adjusting to online publications is a bit like making the transition from small town to big city. The process of shaping the words into what I hope will be sense -- and, better yet, fun -- remains the same, and the “pages” look just like a print publication on the screen. But it’s different, of course, more immediate and also more transitory. I love it, but I still cling to my old ways and print out my columns, so I can hold them in my hands and keep them in the same big binder where I stored all of my old pieces for Jan’s *Pike River Community News* and other magazine pieces I’ve written over the years.

I know that publishing online isn’t just the future but the present, and I want to be a part of it for as long as I can push the keys. But I’ll always be a child of print, just as I’m a child of the small town where I grew up, and I’m betting that words on paper and small towns will survive and thrive right alongside the Internet and the metropolis.

Wherever we live and whatever the delivery system, we will always need our stories, our local news, and our connections with far away folks we’ve never even met.

You can access Janice Kaat’s new blog for writers at: [http://janicekaat.blogspot.com](http://janicekaat.blogspot.com).
The Writing Life

Does this manuscript make me look fat?

By Mary Chace

While I'm writing an article, I read it out loud a thousand times. I try on every word, turning it this way and that, swirling connotations underneath denotations like a little girl in her layered crinoline skirts. But the other day I realized that tweaking a manuscript is a lot less like a toddler twirling in tulle than a middle aged woman trying on swim suits (not that I'm admitting being over 40 or anything).

I recently finished writing an article, and it is perfect, if I do say so myself. Just like that tankini on the rack. You know the one. It's got that cute little skirt bottom that minimizes nominalizations but maximizes assets. And the built-in shelf bra prevents participles, among other things, from dangling. The color is the shade of a perfect metaphor. It brings out the color in my eyes, or better yet, adds some green to my checkbook. The only thing left is to take it off the hanger and try it on. But girls (and probably middle aged women) are better off shopping in groups. I've gotten fewer tickets from the fashion police since Sheri started shopping with me, and I think she may have even saved me from an appearance on What Not to Wear.

But still, the dressing room with its deceptive lighting, 360 mirrors, and her honest commentary is a pretty uncomfortable place to stand in all my tankini glory. I yank at the bottom and adjust the top, and crane my neck to try to see my own behind.

“You look like a chimpanzee chasing its tail.”
“Chimps don’t have tails.”
“Neither do you, so quit looking for one.”
We laugh.
“Now, hold still a second.”
I do. For a second. And another. And at least four more. She doesn’t say anything. I watch her face, but I can’t read her expression. I wish the lighting was better. Finally, I have to ask.
“So, what you think? Does it make me look fat?”
Sheri laughs. “You didn’t even look fat when you were pregnant." Then she looks at my rearview, makes a small humming noise and adds, “But now that you mention it –”

Now how do you like that? She’s in comfy capris, and it’s my behind that looks frumpy? I shoot her a look that’s about as nice as her comment.

She mimics my look. “Would you rather hear it from me or some rude kid in Monterey?”

I huff, but she's right. It’s the whole reason I bring her with me. She tells me what works and what doesn’t.

My internet writing circle serves a similar function.

Most of the time, when I press send on my email, I feel like I’m standing in the dressing room of Macy’s, half-naked, waiting for the inevitable criticism. Criticism always comes, and it's always scathing. When I send a draft to Lori, Louella, Lorraine, or Leigh (I swear, I didn’t make up their names for alliteration’s sake) I fully expect it to come back with more comment boxes than original text. None of them has celebrated a first draft with “Atta girl! Submit as is!”

Lori is my Sadist-in-Chief. We've work-shopped one another's papers since high school and dispensed with pleasantries a couple of decades ago. Her comments tend to be terse, pointed, and deadly accurate. I owe more than one by-line to Lori’s editorial prowess.

Louella champions minor characters. She senses their conflict, dialect and layered story when all I’ve given them is a phone book name and personality to match. She challenges me to think about them as people rather than props.

Lorraine is my personal grammar guru. After graduating with all A's in English, I thought I had mastered my mother tongue, but then again, I also thought that tankini was perfect. An objective opinion is never bad when it comes to swimsuits and comma splices.

Leigh is an engineer by trade, without a metaphor-loving bone in her body. She reads for clarity and meaning. If I stretch a comparison too
far, she’s the first one to note “Overwrought” in
the margin. Usually in red so I don’t
misunderstand.

Her message is always clear: (1) I’ve
abused my favorite literary device and (2)
her review, like the others, is designed to
strengthen the manuscript rather than
demoralize the writer.

Occasionally their comments are a little
difficult, especially when they each choose a
different flaw to point out in the same
manuscript. Then, I feel a little overwhelmed by
the revision process.

But really, what’s my alternative? I could avoid
the half-naked feeling and never submit to their
scrutiny. But that leaves me at the mercy of an
editor or agent, who unlike the mouthy kid at
Monterey, controls my paycheck. I don't want one
of them to be the first to discover that my work is
paunchy in all the wrong places.

So, I’m perfectly happy to listen to my circle's
advice even if sometimes it means hearing, “Well,
now that you mention it…”

Mary Chace frequently graced the pages of
Creativity Connection. This is her first
contribution for Extra Innings. Yay!

Just Oak and Less

By Leah Carson

A local store with one of the goofiest names ever
is now history. Yes, folks: Just Oak & More is no
more.

I never actually visited Just Oak & More,
located on Highway 18 in Wales, Wisconsin. I
believe they sold oak furniture and…well…more.
But it was always fun speculating on how the
name came about.

First came the founders’ initial brainstorming
session: “We’ll deal exclusively with oak pieces.”
“Yeah, and we’ll call ourselves ‘Just Oak.’”

Then, sometime before the exterior signage was
ordered: “Hey, maybe we ought to carry other
stuff too, so we can attract people who don’t like
oak.” “Okay, we’ll be ‘Just Oak and Pine.’”

Then they find a good deal on an odd lot of
maple furniture. “Should we be ‘Just Oak, Pine
and Maple’?” “Too long for the sign. Let’s make
it ‘Just Oak & More.’”

Well, at least my runner-up favorite sign still
exists. The Kettle Moraine Equine Hospital is
alive and well on Highway 12 north of Elkhorn,
Wisconsin. Every time we drive past, I remark to
my husband that it should be called a “horspital,”
and then I let out a horse-laugh whinny.

He hasn’t shot me. Yet.

Leah Carson blogs at http://
spooffrog.blogspot.com She was a regular with
her Carson’s Corner in Creativity Connection,
and we’re delighted to welcome her to Extra
Innings!

My favorite sign, spotted in Bakersfield, CA:
“Guns, ammo, and doll houses.”

And more?
How about “Up to 50% off-- and MORE!”
Wait, now. If it’s “up to,” then... Never mind.
Coach’s Bullpen Briefs
Janice Kaat launches a new blog

Longtime friend Janice Kaat has started a blog for writers, and the introductory post is a wonderful profile of the making of a writer. Jan moved from Wisconsin to Arizona several years ago, but we keep in touch with emails and, now, her blog.

All writers are welcome. She’ll include profiles and interviews with other writers and has promised to post the first chapter from her newly-completed novel, Second Chances, soon. You can access the blog at http://janicekaat.blogspot.com/

And yes, that’s “Kaat,” not “Katt.” When her cousin, pitcher Jim Kaat, was traded to the New York Yankees late in his long, glorious major league career, they misspelled his name in the program. We don’t want that to happen to Jan!

Another great website to bookmark
Join the ranks of the Perspiring Writers

Be sure to drop in on Ned Burke’s inspiring The Perspiring Writer, which is packed with good how-to, profiles, and reviews. Ned’s an author and an expert on publishing an online magazine; he’ll even teach you how to do it.

Madonna Dries Christensen (Meandering with Madonna) and I both write for TPW, btw. In the current issue she has a great piece on first lines you really shouldn’t miss.

If you take a look at my “Keep the Day Job” column (this month: “Writing Through Depression”) please know that the picture under the byline is not yours truly but some fellow named Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., who apparently wrote some books or something.

Subscriptions are free. Check it out at http://theperspiringwriter.com/

Truths for Mature Humans

I think part of a best friend's job should be to clear your computer history as soon as you die.

Nothing sucks more than that moment during an argument when you realize you’re wrong.

I totally take back all those times I didn't want to nap when I was younger.

There is great need for a sarcasm font.

Map Quest really needs to start their directions on # 5. I'm pretty sure I know how to get out of my neighborhood.

"Do not machine wash or tumble dry" means “I will never wash this - ever.”

I hate when I just miss a call by the last ring (Hello? Hello? SHOOT!), but when I immediately call back, it rings nine times and goes to voice mail. What did you do after I didn't answer? Drop the phone and run away?

I hate leaving my house confident and looking good and then not seeing anyone of importance the entire day. What a waste.

I keep some people's numbers in my phone just so I know not to answer when they call.

I would rather try to carry 10 over-loaded plastic bags in each hand than take 2 trips to bring my groceries in.

The only time I look forward to a red light is when I'm trying to finish a text or looking for a phone number in my cell.

I have a hard time deciphering the fine line between boredom and hunger.

How many times is it appropriate to say "What?” before you just nod and smile because you still didn't hear a word they said?

I love the sense of camaraderie when an entire line of cars team up to prevent a jerk from cutting in at the front. Stay strong, brothers and sisters!

Shirts get dirty. Underwear gets dirty. Pants? Pants never get dirty, and you can wear them forever.

Even under ideal conditions people have trouble locating their car keys, finding their cell phone, and Pinning the Tail on the Donkey, but everyone can find and push the snooze button from 3 feet away, in about 1.7 seconds, eyes closed, first time, every time!

From Larry Tobin, E.I. humor editor