EXTRA

INNINGS #12

For writers, their enablers,
and all those already yearning for spring training

Madison, Wisconsin October, 2010

The Missouri Muse

"Real writers" would have the words when a friend dies, wouldn't they?

By Perry Stone

Hi Coach. It's a down in the dumps morning. Sandy Molar died last night. She was aggressively out spoken, old and a lady. She was a friend.

You know that, for me, writing has always been for the fun of it, well maybe until two years ago when I moved out and got a small apartment of my own. After that, my goal sort of become to write a message in which the ink could convey what's lost when the tears on the paper dry up and disappear.

It was my belief that if I could write, really write, the words would pour forth to explain to my children why parents move apart, that love doesn't stop when the doors of two houses separate family, how it takes more love to leave than it does to stay sometimes.

I thought when I learned to write, really write, I would know all the right words. Now I'm not sure.

Over time I have written dozens of stories and stored them away. There are my articles for the newsletter; the books, one finished and two not finished. One I have worked on for years but can't come to terms with 120 pages being enough, even though Katherine Coulter brags of doing two books before puberty and confesses, in an interview we did, each of those were only two or three pages long.

I write continuously without any real desire to be published. My search is to learn all the words. Of course I haven't conquered spelling and punctuation pertaining to the words I know. Yet, I have been seeking a higher level for the last two years, not realizing until now what it is I want to accomplish, on this quest for expression.

I want to know words that could spill across the page assuring my family that dad will always be there, convince them they haven't lost anything or anyone, that things can be the same while being different. My lexis would come together to inspire hope in their young minds and disintegrate any fears or despair.

When "I love you" brings doubt and confusion into the children's eyes I want to know the words to say that would do away with any and all uncertainty and clear up whatever confusion they might experience. Surely with a dictionary filled with literally thousands of words, such syntax is there to be found. And if I find it, I will be able to convey my heart to those I've spent a life loving.

If I were a real writer, I would know these words, wouldn't I and I could scribe them in indelible ink, so when the tear drops dry up and disappear from the paper loved ones couldn't doubt my feelings or my dedication to family.

Nevertheless, today, only tears can express what I feel after hearing an old friend died.

Paw Joe

In this issue

E.I. introduces a new feature:
In the Screening Room
with film critic Jacob McLaughlin,
says welcome to our new subscribers from Suzanne Beecher's *DearReader Book Club*s, and tries to jolly up anyone feeling bad because summer vacation's over.

Welcome to Suzanne's Dear Readers!

A few weeks back, Suzanne Beecher asked me to write a guest column for her wonderful online book clubs, which fly under the banner of **DearReader**. (See www.dearreader.com for details. All the clubs are free and fun.)

She also invited readers to send their favorite recipes, with stories to go with them, and she ran the best of the bunch, a nifty tie-in with her book, *Muffins & Mayhem*, reviewed here recently.

After my column ran, I heard from dozens of reader/writers. Of course, I was offering to give away one free copy each of my novels, *Walking Wounded: A Wartime Love Story, Obsessions*, the fourth in rgw Monona Quinn mystery series, and *Off Season: A Novel of Love, Faith, and Minor League Baseball*. I'm sure that had something to do with the nice response.

Even nicer, about 50 of you subscribed to *Extra Innings*. Welcome to you all.

For the rest of you, here's my column.

Why I didn't enter Suzanne's recipe contest

When I cook, nobody ever says, "You simply must give me the recipe!" Truth is, I don't have one. (If you ate my food, you'd know that.) Mostly, I only cook for my wife and myself, anyway (with a little spillage for the ever-vigilant dogs), and she knows my 'recipe' all too well.

Everything I cook that doesn't start with 'first remove from plastic container' begins with Pam, a skillet, and a red onion. After I get the onion chopped up and frying (if I had a recipe, would I be 'sauteing'?), I add some sort of ground-up animal (turkey, mostly) and then some manner of vegetation, often peppers, tomatoes, and--if I'm being especially solicitous of my aforementioned, long- suffering wife--mushrooms.

If it's going to be chili, I put in beans. If not, I don't.

Then comes the seasoning, generally essence of Lawry's or Newman's Own. (His green salsa covers a multitude of sins.)

When it's getting close to done (I like some crust on my round animal), it's time to grate some cheese on the whole deal.

Then I wrap it (tortilla), stuff it (taco), or let it sit on a plate with Fritos*.

(*Note to editor: I realize I've been dropping brand names like a regular Stephen King. Please do not, under any circumstances, put that stupid little TM thingee in the circle after them. It looks stupid.)

By now you've figured out why folks don't ask for the recipe. Maybe the nicest thing you can say for my cooking is that it's 'transparent.' 'Guileless' works, too.

Ironically (and a good recipe should always contain irony), students often ask me for a recipe for writing. I don't have one of those, either, and I try to discourage them from trying to find one. Annie Lamott says to write one word, or one bird, at a time, Richard Lederer says simple words are best. Mark Twain says if you can catch an adjective, kill it. That's really all you need to get started.

When I write I start, not with a red onion, but with an image, often a place into which I put a couple of the poor souls I'm currently torturing and let them react to it and each other. No Lawry's or Newman's; I try to let the nouns and verbs do the heavy work.

As close as I come to a recipe I can sum up in three lines, seven words:

1) Pay attention

2) Try stuff

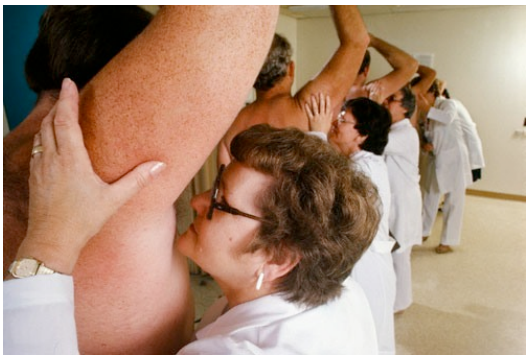
3) Hold nothing back

Now pass the cheese grater. The animal's getting nice and crusty.

Marshall J. Cook
Email him at mcook@dcs.wisc.edu

Marshall J. Cook's most recent novel is "Walking Wounded," a wartime romance set in Madison, WI in 1944. He taught writing at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Continuing Studies for 31 years. He publishes a free monthly online newsletter for writers called "Extra Innings." Email him at mcook@dcs.wisc.edu. *Ask for the newsletter if you'd like, but do not ask for the recipe.*

So you think your job stinks!



In our unending quest to make your lives better, we present a series of on-the-job photos to let you know that maybe your day-job isn't so bad after all. There, now. Don't you feel better?
Thanks to Linda Konichek

PUNishment

A man's home is his castle, in a manor of speaking.
Dijon vu - the same mustard as last time.
Practice safe eating - always use condiments.
Shotgun wedding - A case of wife or death.
A man needs a mistress just to break the monogamy.
A hangover is the wrath of grapes.
Use condoms on every conceivable occasion.
When two egotists meet, it's an I for an I.
Will: a dead give away.
In democracy your vote counts. In feudalism your count votes.
A chicken crossing the road is poultry in motion.
If you don't pay your exorcist, you get repossessed.
The man who fell into an upholstery machine is fully recovered.
Money is tainted - Taint yours and taint mine.
A midget fortune-teller who escapes from prison is a small medium at large.
Once you've seen one shopping center, you've seen a mall.
Bakers trade bread recipes on a knead-to-know basis.
Santa's helpers are subordinate clauses.
Acupuncture is a jab well done
Thanks to Judy Lawton

Extra Innings #12

Special Back-to-Work Issue

Madison, Wisconsin, October, 2010

Columnist this issue: Madonna Dries Christensen, Perry Stone, Jacob McLaughlin, Randi Mrvos
Feature writer: Lisa Krenz
Fiction: Mary Chace
The Masked Man: Brace Beamer
Your announcer is Fred Foy
Editor-in-Coach: Marshall J. Cook
Professor Emeritus, University of Wisconsin-Madison Department of Continuing Studies

I publish ***Extra Innings*** monthly and distribute it free to an open-enrollment mailing list. To get yourself on the list, email the Coach at mcook@dcs.wisc.edu

Extra Innings comes to you through the good graces of the folks of the writing program at the Division of Continuing Studies, Liberal Studies and the Arts, University of Wisconsin-Madison, led by Christine DeSmet. Find out about their workshops, courses, conferences, and critiques services at:
www.dcs.wisc.edu/lsa/writing

Extra Innings is a proud booster of
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.

Meandering with Madonna

Master Of The Haunted

by Madonna Dries Christensen

All houses wherein men have lived and died are haunted houses. Through the open doors the harmless phantoms on their errands glide, with feet that make no sound upon the floors.

— Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

There's nothing like a chilling ghost story, read while huddled under the blankets or told around a crackling campfire in the deep, dark woods. You couldn't find a more qualified storyteller than Troy Taylor, historian of the supernatural and author of more than 60 books on ghosts, hauntings, crime, and unexplained events.

Taylor founded the American Ghost Society, America's largest and most respected research group. He investigates paranormal happenings, is owner of American Hauntings Tour Company, founder of Whitechapel Press, which publishes books about the supernatural, owner of Prairie Fire Bookstore, and publisher of *American Hauntings* magazine.

He's a popular speaker and has been featured in newspaper and magazine articles, in radio and television programs, in numerous documentaries on the History Channel, A & E, Discovery, PBS, CMT, and on network programs and syndicated news shows. He appeared as himself in a feature film about the paranormal.

Taylor says there are two kinds of people —those who believe in ghosts and those who won't admit they do.

Several years back, I wrote a few ghost stories for Taylor's *Ghosts of The Prairie*. He has since moved from Alton, Illinois, "One of the most haunted small towns in America," to Decatur, Illinois. I recently caught up with the ghost buster for an interview.

MDC: What sparked your interest in ghosts? As a boy, did you have an encounter with something that went bump in the night?

TT: Not really, the supernatural was just something I have always been interested in, even as a boy. I was the first in school to order all of the "true ghost stories" from the weekly library paper. As I got older, everyone knew that if they heard a ghost story, they needed to pass it along to me. On Halloween night each year, I took my friends on a ghost tour of local haunted spots, never knowing that someday I would be doing it for a living!

MDC: I read that the Illinois hospital in which you were born is haunted by a phantom nun. Nuns can be scary. Do you attribute that to the onset of your interest?

TT: I never thought about that, but perhaps that has something to do with it! She was actually a benevolent spirit; nothing scary. At least that's what the nurses I've spoken with have told me.

MDC: You have more than 60 books to your credit. That's impressive. When did you write your first and what's the title?

TT: Well, it's my day job. It's not a part-time thing. I usually spend anywhere from 8-10 hours every day at work and a large part of that is strictly writing on whatever project(s) I'm working on at the time.

My first book was written in 1994 and was called *Haunted Decatur*. It's a collection of ghost stories of my hometown.

MDC: Other than ghostly subjects, what do you read and who's on your favorite authors list?

TT: I don't read a lot of other ghost books, unless it's something I have a real interest in or it's a book written by a friend. I do read some horror, mostly Stephen King, but most of my casual reading is thrillers or crime fiction. I'm a fan of Robert B. Parker, Michael Connelly, Jonathan Kellerman, Douglas Preston & Lincoln Child, and John Connolly's Charlie Parker books are absolutely phenomenal.

MDC: Tell us about the feature film you were in.

TT: Ah, the *St. Francisville Experiment.* Well, I appeared as myself in what started out as a paranormal documentary and deteriorated into a "*Blair Witch Project*" rip-off. I'm in the early, documentary portion of the film and I've never endorsed the authenticity of the blatantly fake "paranormal" scenes that followed after the participants entered the house. I've taken a lot of flak about my role in this film, but what I can say is that it was a lot of fun and the cast and most of the crew were great people to work with.

There's no point in trying to take it seriously. It's just a movie, and as long as you don't go into it believing it's authentic, it can actually be a lot of fun. It's never going to be fondly recalled as a highlight of my career but I don't regret taking part in it. It was a great experience and a real look at what happens when things in Hollywood go awry.

MDC: Have any of your books been the basis for a movie?

TT: There's one optioned for a movie right now, but I can't really talk about it much. I have done some other options over the years that have never worked out and a couple of my books have provided material for paranormal documentaries.

MDC: Do you live in a haunted house?

TT: Not the house I live in now, but there have been a couple over the years. I lived in a former bakery in Alton, Illinois, that was haunted by the ghost of a little boy. A lot of strange stuff happened there.

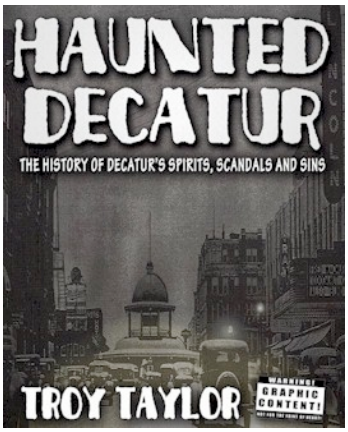
Another house I lived in was haunted by—I think—a former owner who had died there. My cat was fascinated by one particular room. She would sit outside the doorway and stare at something moving around in the room that none of us could see. She would never step foot inside.

Oddly, that room was impossible to heat. Even with the heating vents open, and hot air blowing out of them, the room was always at least 20 degrees colder than the rest of the house.

MDC: I found information about you on a site about weird writers. Is that a dubious distinction, being labeled weird?

TT: That's a site for writers who have worked on the *Weird U.S.* Series that was started by Mark Moran and Mark Sceurman from *Weird N.J.* They started their magazine in the early 1990s and it was later turned into a book. I did the first spin-off from their titles, *Weird Illinois.* And it's not a bad thing to be labeled "weird." I certainly fit the description! Although in this case, the things we write about are odd, unusual, and out of the ordinary. When we call something weird in the books, it's because it adds a different dimension to the place or state that we're writing about. Something that makes it unique, so to speak**.**

MDC: Henrik Ibsen, the Norwegian author of *Ghosts*, wrote, "I almost believe we are all ghosts! It is not only what we have inherited from our father and mother that haunts us. It is all sorts of



old, dead ideas, all kinds of old, dead beliefs, and so forth. They have no life, yet they cleave to us, and we cannot shake ourselves free from them." Do you agree with Ibsen, or do you have a different take on ghosts?

TT: It's an interesting idea and I can see where it has some relevance.

I usually think of ghosts as a little piece of someone that has been left behind, usually a memory of a time when that person was particularly happy or particularly sad. That emotion leaves an imprint on the place where it occurred and that imprint repeats itself over and over as a haunting.

I guess I have a rather romantic idea of ghosts. I don't know if it's possible for a person to stay behind after death, but if we have a choice, I think I'll hang around for a while.

MDC: Me, too. Thanks for hanging around for this chat.

Readers, with Halloween coming, if you're in Taylor's neck of the woods, join one of his spine-tingling tours, or stop by his bookstore and stock up on ghost stories. If that's not possible, have some ghostly fun viewing his Websites. There's more fun there than you can digest in one sitting: http://prairieghosts.com, and http://www.hauntedamericatours.com.

This piece first ran in The Perspiring Writer *for Fall, 2009.*

In the Screening Room
with film critic Jacob McLaughlin

Director Tarantino delivers a double shot of adrenaline to the heart

Amelie- (April 25, 2001)
A+
This is one delightful film, a wonderful comedy. The cinematography is gorgeous, the acting is perfect, and it's the best feel-good film I've ever seen. The characters are memorable: The Glass Man, the man with the tape recorder, Mr. Collignon and Amelie herself. She has such great traits, and that carries the film even if the third act does drag a bit. It's one to watch when you're feeling down.

Inglorious Basterds- (August 21, 2009)
A+
Tarantino's best film since *Pulp Fiction*. I've watched it many times and never get bored with it. First off the story is very good; it's great how Tarantino changes history. You wish it were true. And the dialogue is great. Tarantino is able to have your heart pounding when people are just at a table talking. That's an achievement.

The acting is well done. The three performances that stick out are Diane Kruger, Melanie Laurent and Christoph Waltz. Waltz is phenomenal. Where has this guy been? He pulls off one of the best portrayals of a villain I've ever seen. He's able to make you hate him, and yet you like him.

I've only seen three films in the theaters three times: *The Dark Knight, Inception* and this.

Pulp Fiction- (October 15, 1994)
A+
This and *Inception* are my two favorite films of all time. Tarantino brings us a classic masterpiece. The story is genius taking us in different directions every time we get used to the one we're in. It brings out the best performances of everyone in it: John Travolta, Uma Thurman, Bruce Willis. But Samuel L. Jackson has the best performance as Jules. He's easily one of the coolest characters ever in film. His Ezekiel speech is a classic scene. There are SO many scenes that are memorable. This film is a blast, like an adrenaline needle to the heart.

Manos The Hands Of Fate-(November 15, 1966)
F-
The worst movie of all time, an absolutely horrendous experience. First off 'manos' means 'hands.' So the title is literally Hands the Hands of Fate. Its characters are horrible, except Torgo, who's hilarious. The acting is some of the worst I've ever seen. The dialogue is horrific and cringeworthy. It tries to be scary, but the outcome is hilarious.

By all means avoid this film unless it's the classic episode of *Mystery Science Theater 3000*. I can't imagine seeing it any other way.

Entertainment Weekly listed the **Top Ten Highest Grossing Films Of the Summer.** Five are awful.
1. Toy Story 3 $405.9 Million- Loved it
2. Iron Man 2- $312.1m- Not as good as the first, but still entertaining
3. Twilight part who cares anymore? $298.1- I really do not like this series.
4. Inception-$271.6-m Favorite film tied with *Pulp Fiction* and *The Lord Of the Rings Trilogy*
5. Shrek 4-$236.9m- Another unnecessary sequel
6. Despicable Me-$236.1m- Might rent this. Looked like a decent animated film.
7. The Karate Kid-$175.9m- Another unnecessary remake.
8. Grown Ups-$159.4m- Another awful comedy that I will never see.
9. The Last Airbender-$130.7m- From the mind of M. Night Shamalamadingdong.
10. Salt-$113.7m- Might rent it.

Jacob McLaughlin lives in Belleville, Wisconsin, where he does mano-a-mano combat with films new and old. If he loves a film, he really loves it, but if he hates it, he'll warn you to steer clear.

First Person Singular

My not-so-secret love affair

By Lisa Krenz

It's been the longest running love affair of my life, predating my husband by 20 years or more.

In the early years my parents chalked it up to an ebullient infatuation. As I grew older I could hide it behind my career as a teacher. Then as a parent I thought I could explain away the costs to my husband by falling back on the old *for the sake of the children* line. It appears now the children have joined me in my great ardor; in fact they've deepened my affection. My husband has no hope of retaliation against us.

Even though I am long past childhood, my love for children's literature endures. My heart still races at the thought of my Scholastic book orders appearing magically on my fourth grade desk.

My enthusiasm for book orders only increased as my children brought home the newsprint flyers advertising literary adventures to lands yet unknown or visits with familiar companions from my grade school days.

Visits to the book mobile and the library were like going to your favorite aunt's house, a place of safe retreat. I remember so many titles as if they were childhood friends, *Charlotte's Web, Stuart Little, Little House on the Prairie* (I still have my original set from 1973), *Homer Price, The Phantom Tollbooth, Mandy, The Mixed Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiller, A Wrinkle in Time, Are You There God? It's Me Margaret*. Who are the friends on your list?

The year I was nine I checked out *Emmet's Pig* from the school library so many times the librarian would have it waiting for me. I don't know why; maybe the farm in the book made me feel closer to the relatives we had just left two states behind.

Oh, and the tears I shed over Charlotte's death. You know of whom I speak.

I'm convinced I wouldn't have survived adolescence without Judy Blume. God bless her and all the authors who helped me navigate the winding, rocky road of my youth.

As with all affairs of the heart, my affections have waxed and waned over the years, changed from blind infatuation to deep admiration. My adult affection was reignited by taking Children's Literature as part of my elementary education degree. Who knew you could get college credit for doing something you loved so much? Then as a teacher it was quite appropriate and even encouraged to continue my affair with this section of the book store.

Just as children are not merely miniature adults, children's literature is not just a miniature form of its adult counterpart. It is much more It is life from a whole different perspective.

As with all fiction, children's literature has its share of pulp, but the good stuff is full of fascinating characters, rich vocabulary, deftly painted images, and excursions to places unknown. Children are much more willing to suspend disbelief to take a motorcycle ride with a mouse or ride on a broomstick playing quiddich, and thus children's literature has the freedom to inhabit a rich and complex universe unlike no other.

Thanks to the countless stories I've read anthropomorphizing mice I have a terrible time killing them. (My husband comes in handy here.)

I also love how authors of children's literature capture the everyday life and conversation of kids, kids just like I was or like my children are, kids who are dealing with the same issues my students are.

In the last few years as my own children have shifted from picture books to chapter books and as I've been writing more fiction myself, I have fallen in love all over again with the chapter book. My children and I have traveled together to the far off lands of Narnia and Hogwarts without ever leaving the living room couch, a shared experience that will last a lifetime.

They've also introduced me to new friends, *Because of Winn Dixie, The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane, The Invention of Hugo Cabret*

(my daughter's all time favorite book), *The Graveyard Book, The Hunger Games* (my son's all time favorite outside of Harry Potter) and countless others.

Right now my daughter and I are reading Jacqueline Kelly's *The Evolution of Calpurnia Tate,* and it is just so delicious.

I've learned so much about writing from reading these books. I highly recommend any of them.

So why don't I write a children's book if I love them so much? To me it seems like having the audacity to say, "Any kid could draw that" while looking at a Picasso. No, any kid couldn't. And not just any writer can write children's literature, at least not the kind that has sustained this lifelong love of mine. We stand on the shoulders of these authors.

Children's literature grows children who read. Children who read become adults who read, who love words and stories, adults who pass on this love of books to sustain and nourish their own children. Without shame or regret, I intend to continue this love affair for a lifetime.

Don't like the dress code at work?

Letters to the Locker Room

Gabby gets his due

Dear Coach,
I just finished reading *E.I*#11 and saw the end photo of Roy Rogers and I believe Gabby Hayes. Gabby Hayes is from Willing which is near Wellsville, New York. We used to have a Gabby Hayes Day here in Wellsville in the summer with sidewalk sales and contests to find the best Roy, Dale Evans and Gabby. We even had shootouts on Main Street between good guys and bad.

When I was a kid growing up in Buffalo, we watched lots of Westerns.
Take care.
Andrea Schoenthal
That was indeed the great George "Gabby" Hayes, king of the sidekicks. Did you know that off screen Hayes was a complete dude? Three-piece suits were his true 'uniform.'

Pat still doesn't want to dress for school!

Dear Editor-in-Coach:
I can't get over your *EI* dedication to "every kid who hates to put on shoes and go back to school." That was me. I'd spend the entire summer barefoot, only to suffer the torture of having to don a dress once again, plus stuff my feet into shoes! Sometimes I wonder if I might've learned a more in elementary school if I wasn't constantly squirming, 'cause those shoes never failed to pinch my feet.

My mom always insisted that I had wide feet because I always went barefoot. I prefer to believe I went barefoot because my feet were and are still so wide. Give me sandals or give me painful feet.

My Grandpa once had a print of September Morn hanging in his and Grandma's living room. It disappeared shortly after me and my cousins made a big deal about the naked lady on the wall. September Morn was replaced by a boring print of a tall ship. I have a feeling Grandma was instrumental in replacing the Morn. Poor Grandpa.
Pat (Fitzgerald)
I still hate putting shoes on come fall! I'm just glad Mama doesn't make me put on a dress for the first day of school any more.

The Writer's Life

To Blog or Not to Blog—

By Randi Lynn Mrvos

That is indeed the question! Though there is plenty of advice online about starting a blog, I wondered if a blog would be right for me.

Would it be easy to set up? Would I have followers? Would I be able to post on a daily basis? And most of all, would I find a topic that I'd be passionate about?

I felt that a class might be a good way to find out. So I registered for a three hour blogging workshop (Blogging 101) at the Carnegie Center in Lexington, Kentucky, taught by husband and wife team, Andrew Owens and Katherine Green-Owens.

Andrew kicked off the session by giving us a list of what we should know before starting a blog, such as finding a unique idea, creating a memorable title and URL, and designing with aesthetic details.

He stressed the importance of making each entry matter—as you write, ask yourself: so what? In addition, Andrew pointed out that we should keep posts under 300 words, be opinionated, and create links to other blogs.

Although this was a lot of information, I thought this might not be as hard as I'd thought.

Following the lecture, Andrew passed out an article with excellent advice. Written by a local businessman, the piece recommended that a blogger know his audience, make the content worth reading, and post frequency. Most importantly, a blog should serve a purpose.

To illustrate these points, Katherine gave a brief Powerpoint presentation of blogs she follows and admires. I was wowed by the artfulness of design and creativity in content.

During the last hour of class, our instructors showed us how to set up a Google account. (I can't thank Katherine enough for guiding me through this stage!) Then we clicked on Blogger.com. Here we chose a template for the layout, decided on a background color and image, played with fonts for our title, and inserted pictures and other gadgets.

We then penned our opening messages until the end of class. Learning that a blog was easy to set up and knowing that I could control how often I'd like to post boosted my confidence.

Later that evening, I studied more blogs to get a feel for content and titles. It seemed like just about anything goes: there's no magic formula. I wanted a catchy title, so my husband and I brainstormed and came up with: **The Maggie Project: 30 publishers, 15 agents, 5 contests, 1 book.** Why Maggie? She's the main character of the picture book I want to publish.

Aiming to post weekly, I invite you to follow at: www.themaggieproject.blogspot.com. I'll chronicle the replies and results of my submissions to publishers, agents, and contests. In addition, the blog will present insights and offer inspiration for writers. Maybe it's too soon to know how this new-to-me social media will work out. But for now, blogging feels right to me.

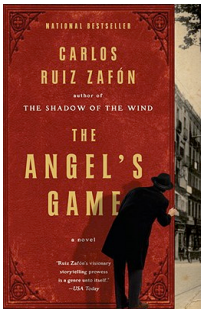
Your job's dangerous, you say?

Photo by Vincent Laforet / The New York Times

What coach is reading out in the bullpen

The Angel's Game

Carlos Ruiz Zafon



Anchor Books, 2010

"A writer never forgets the first time he accepted a few coins or a word of praise in exchange for a story. He will never forget the sweet poison of vanity in his blood and the belief that, if he succeeds in not letting anyone discover his lack of talent, the dream of literature will provide him with a roof over his head, a hot meal at the end of the day, and what he covets the most: his name printed on a miserable piece of paper that surely will outlive him. A writer is condemned to remember that moment, because from then on he is doomed and his soul has a price."

If that first paragraph doesn't hook you, maybe you aren't really a writer-- or a reader.

Just go down one more paragraph, until you encounter the narrator's description of his deputy editor at *The Voice of Industry*: "Don Basilio was a forbidding-looking man with a bushy mustache who did not suffer fools and who subscribed to the theory that the liberal use of adverbs and adjectives was the mark of a pervert or someone with a vitamin deficiency. Any journalist prone to florid prose would be sent off to write funeral notices for three weeks. If, after this penance, the culprit relapsed, Don Basilio would ship him off permanently to the 'House and Homes' pages. We were all terrified of him, and he knew it."

By now you've turned the page and are on page two. You should already be regretting that there are only 529 pages to go.

Zafon, the most popular writer working in Spain these days, became known to Americanos with publication of his novel *The Shadow of the WInd* a few years ago. That novel (and this pun is obviously intended) completely blew me away, so I've been waiting for another.

I'm so glad the wait's over.

Movie review: Get Low

Get Low is a gorgeous story of confession, forgiveness, and redemption. I sat in the theater and wept in joy and sorrow when it was done.

A young man named Felix Bush does something that deeply shames him and for which he can't forgive himself. He goes into self-imposed exile, building himself a home deep in the Georgia woods and living there for 40 years, with only a mule for company.

The mule is good company, and the home is well made, as is everything of wood he sets his hand to, but still, his soul yearns for forgiveness even as his face becomes lined and he hides his grim-set lips in a long, bushy beard.

He will build his own sturdy, simple, beautiful coffin as well, and throw his own funeral party while he's still alive.

He really wants someone to come forward and tell his story, the confession he has locked inside himself for 40 years. When no one will, he must somehow find the courage to do it himself.

Everyone in this movie disappears into their characters and this world. Duvall as Bush is as good as he has ever been, creating a character as memorable as his old Texas Ranger, Captain, Augustus McRae, in *Lonesome Dove* or his alcoholic, down and out country western singer (or is that redundant?), Mac Sledge in *Tender Mercies.* (These are three of the finest portrayals ever, folks.)

Bill Murray is marvelous as failed mortician Frank Quinn ("If you can't make a success of this business, it must be you"), his fleshy, pock-marked face still perfectly crafted for the cynical smirk. Sissy Specek as the still-radiant sister of Duvall's only true love, Bill Cobb as the deadpan, world weary minister who stands by Duvall at the end, and Lucas Black as Murray's assistant-with-scruples, are also fully equal to their roles.

"For every man like me," Duvall tells Buddy near movie's end, "there's a man like you. I'd forgotten that."

The Book of Illusions
Paul Auster

Henry Holt & Company, 2002

For every movie like *Get Low*, there are dozens of stupid, demeaning ones; for every novel like *The Book of Illusions*, by Paul Auster, there dozens of puerile, petty, cynical ones. But the good ones redeem all the rest and make the search worth making, don't they? We must never forget that.

The Illusions in Auster's marvelous novel are primarily created by a silent film comedian named Hector Mann, another tormented soul who flees from an act for which he cannot forgive himself and hides himself away, making well-crafted movies that no one will ever see. (He has instructed his lover and confidant to destroy them when he dies.)

Mann cannot narrate his own story, of course. He must remain a mystery, at a distance, until the end. That job is left to a man himself broken by the death of his wife and daughter in a plane crash, who loses himself in work, first by writing a book about Mann's 12 two-reel perfections of silent comedy, and then by pursuing the story of the man who created them.

Like *Get Low*, it's a hard story. We endure the toils and snares of the journey, just as we do in life. But as with *Get Low*, I found meaning and affirmation here, and I rejoiced that someone had told such a rich story, so beautifully.

The Ragtime Fool
Larry Karp

Poisoned Pen Press, 2010

We need our stories, our entertainments, and we must seek out the glories that lift us up, help us endure, and ultimately transcend our earthly woes. The ragtime creations of Scott Joplin have always been one such entertainment for me, and to that I can now add *The Ragtime Fool,* third in a series of Joplin-based mysteries by Larry Karp. In it, we unearth a heretofore secret diary of Joplin's, which would throw light on this neglected-genius' creations but would also uncover some seamy deeds done in little Sedalia, Missouri.

The white boy who would follow Joplin on the ragtime road has the diary; the old barber who was Joplin's only white student and a Joplin devotee wants it. So does a woman claiming to be Joplin's daughter, and so do several people who would be exposed if the book ever came to light.

Add in a couple of folks who want to make money off it and a few Klansmen willing to kill on general principles because of it, and you've got yourself a page-turner with meaning.

Guess I've spent a lot of my life trying to create stories that would do for others what these stories do for me, and I get up in the morning hoping I'll find some more. How about you?

RIP-- or good riddance?
-- George Hitchcock

George Hitchcock, founder of *Kayak Magazine*, recently died at 96. He created one of the most distinctive literary magazines ever.

He also created what may have been the downright meanest rejection slips ever. He used Victorian etchings to depict a beheading, for example, or a mountain climber falling into a crevasse, along with a cheery caption saying, "Sorry, but the editors of kayak feel that your submission is not quite what we need this season. Thanks anyway."

He claimed to have created the magazine after finding other poetry magazines "extraordinarily boring," he told *Caliban* magazine. "I thought that *Kayak* would relieve the tedium, c'est tout."

He ended the magazine's feisty run after 64 issues. "Any more," he said, "and it would risk seeming an institution. After that, ossification and rigor mortis."

From the obituary written by William Grimes, **New York Times**, September 4, 2010.

EDWIN NEWMAN
1919-2010

Newsman and staunch defender of the English language

Hear the one about the guy who dried off his shoes with an old newspaper? Oh, yeah. These are The Times that dry men's soles, for sure. That's from Ed Newman, and may he rest in peace.

A sign in his office announced, "Abandon 'hopefully,' all ye who enter here."

E.I. Flash Fiction Special

Safe Danger

By Mary C. Chace

I never would have purchased this house if I'd known that I'd die here. I always thought I'd go out in a blaze of glory, like Orion IV, not in the obscurity of Mamma's cellar.

I bought the Homeplace for her after my space walk. I wanted her to finally have a place to call Home. I figured five acres would give Mamma a little tranquility on Earth, where city lights couldn't wash out the moon.

I was a kid when Pop died. Mamma moved us in with her older sister. Aint Vera considered it family duty, but Uncle Chet called us extra mouths. Feeding two "worthless females" riled him up like a grizzly with his paw caught in a tin can.

The night of Pop's wake, I buried myself in the hide-a-bed sheets to muffle Uncle Chet's bellowing. When Mamma finally crawled in beside me, I peeked out. Moonlight peered through the naked windows, and the winter oaks scared me with their bony branches spreading shadows across Mamma's tear-red face.

"I wanna go home."

Mamma held me tight. "Anywhere you can see the moon is home, Honeybee. The same God who hung the moon knows your address, too."

"I hate the moon. It looks like it's dying."

"Most things will for a while." Mamma sighed and kissed my nose. "But can I tell you a secret?"

I expected her to say something dumb about moon shadows being angel tears for Pop, but I nodded anyhow.

"That big ole black patch is the Sea of Tranquility, where Apollo XI landed. It looks spooky from down here, but up there –" She pushed away a tear -- "It's the safest place you can be. Danger and safety can look just alike on the surface, Honeybee. Wisdom is knowing the difference."

Crossing Chet was always dangerous and seldom wise. But Mamma drew battle lines when I was accepted to the Air Force Academy.

"This is your ticket to the stars. Take it, no matter how loud he hollers."

Her wisdom followed me to Colorado Springs and, later, NASA. Mamma loathes combustibles, though, and couldn't watch her only child hurled into outer space in a tin can filled with rocket fuel. She came all the way to Cape Canaveral but hid her eyes at blast-off.

Mamma and I are good hiders. We hid from our past by not coming home. For decades.

But here I am: Flat on my back in the cellar of Mamma's Homeplace, staring at the underside of her termite-infested porch. I don't remember falling through. It was daylight when I waved good-bye to her, but now I'm looking into the black maw of space through jagged, porch-board teeth.

Pain throttles my head and neck, but the nerves in my legs are silent. Panic rises in my throat with bile.

Twelve-foot drop.

Concrete landing.

Broken back.

Career. . . over.

"No task is finished until the loose ends are tied." Mamma's proverbs are ingrained in me like fingerprints. My career is *almost* over. A final mission remains: o survive.

I don't want to die here, in the home bought for good memories. But I have no food. No water. No phone. No plan.

I curse Aint's husband and replay the call that beckoned me here.

"Chet's dying. With Vera and your Pop both gone, I – I can't do it by myself. I need you, Honeybee. Will you come?"

I came, but I couldn't go with her to Chet's. So, I promised to cook supper here. My stomach growls. Hunger gnaws my soul like loneliness. I look to the sky for company, but the moon is half-eaten by the Sea of Tranquility tonight.

I can't help but think of Pop: How he died of cancer. How his lungs probably looked like that moon, pock marked with black craters. How

Mamma never knew I swiped his favorite lighter and have carried it in my pocket ever since. She'd probably have a conniption if she knew I kept it filled with lighter fluid.

I strike it. Flame punctuates the darkness like star glow. The boards look splintered enough for kindling.

Chet's house is just a stone's throw away. If Mamma so much as catches the scent of smoke in the air, she'll investigate.

Sometimes safety looks likes danger. That's why tomorrow I'm setting it on fire.

Mary Chace writes from her home in CA where she is surrounded by as much quiet and solitude as a husband, 2 teenagers, 4 children, a dog, a cat, a hamster, 2 lizards, and a turtle can provide. To hone her fiction skills, she enters prompt-based writing contests. "Safe Danger" was named among the top five in a recent Writer's Digest *"My Story" contest. The prompt was to begin the 750 (or less) piece, "I would have never purchased this house if I'd have known...." and also to end with a designated phrase, which you've now read.*

Feel as if you've lost your individuality in the workplace?

PAUL CONRAD

June, 1924-September, 2010

Remember these guys?

It’s been a long time since they rode across our television screens, buckeroos, but their story isn’t over. Monette Bebow-Reinhard has written a sequel to her first Bonanza novel (authorized by the folks who retain the rights, btw), and you can get you mitts on a copy through all the usual sources, including Amazon.com.

Mystic Fire (Cambridge Books, 2009) is a big departure from the first Cartwright saga, *Felling of the Sons*. Abraham Lincoln's haunted by ghosts of dead soldiers, and Hoss is in "love.” Adam's missing, Joe thinks Ben is dead, and Ben follows the trail of a slave's suspicion that Lincoln is a traitor. *Mystic Fire* leads the Cartwrights into four misadventures, involving Lincoln, Mark Twain, slavery, greed, and Victorian Spiritualism.

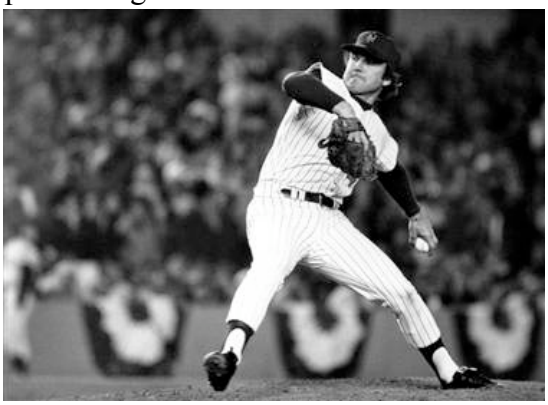
For information or to order a copy directly from the author, contact Monette at www.chasingthevrykolakas.info

In honor of the end of the baseball season A few great baseball quotes:

"I'm glad I don't play anymore. I could never learn all of those handshakes."-Phil Rizzuto
"They broke it to me gently. The manager came up to me before a game and told me they didn't allow visitors in the clubhouse."-Bob Uecker
"He slides into second with a stand-up double."- Jerry Coleman
"I have an Alka-Seltzer bat. You know-plop, plop, fizz, fizz, when the pitcher sees me walking up there he says, 'Oh, what a relief it is'."-Andy Van Slyke
From the immortal Yogi Berra:

“Baseball is 90% mental and the other half is physical.”

"Why does everyone stand up and sing *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* when they're already there?"-Larry Anderson
"They should move back first base a step to eliminate all those close plays."-John Lowenstein
"I never questioned the integrity of an umpire. Their eyesight, yes."-Leo Durocher
Pitcher Tug McGraw, asked whether he preferred grass or Astroturf:



“I dunno. I never smoked any Astroturf.”—
"The last time the Cubs won the World Series was 1908. The last time they were in one was 1945. Hey, any team can have a bad century."- Tom Trebelhorn