EXTRA

INNINGS

**In which we celebrate writers, their enablers,
and every poet who ever rhymed 'June,' 'moon,' and 'swoon'**

#20 Madison, Wisconsin June , 2011

Essays from images

Larry Penn: A Wisconsin treasure

By Den Adler:

Folksinger Larry Penn reaches into a metal case and hands me a cassette titled *Still Feel Like Rollin'*.

"My marketing plan was to reach two groups with this one tape," he says, "with trucker songs on one side and railroad songs on the other. But it turned out the Teamsters wouldn't buy it 'cause of the train songs, and the Rails wouldn't have it for the truckers'."

It was vintage Larry—self-deprecating humor delivered with his gravelly voice. I first heard it in August 2003 at the Shawano (WI) Folk Music Festival, when longtime folksingers Larry Penn and Mark Dvorak sat together on a tree-shaded outdoor stage preparing to sing train songs together for an hour.

"What key ya wanna use, Larry?" Mark asked. "A? C? D? F?"

"I don't do F," Larry growled. He was in his 70s then, a retired trucker of 30-plus years.

Mark, almost 30 years younger, laughed. "*What*?!? Whatsamatter, are ya *new* at this? Just capo down!"

Larry glared. They hadn't even started their gig, and they already hated each other.

But they went ahead and did the show—well.

Turns out they were old friends and had collaborated on several releases, going back to 1991 and *When Steam Was King*, a tape of train songs for the National Railroad Museum in Green Bay. They also produced *A Ride on the Westbound* in 2002. Other Larry Penn albums include *The Whiskey's Gone* from 1992.

Larry Penn at play

Photo taken by Den Adler
Café Carpe, Fort Atkinson, WI,
March 11, 2011,

Larry mostly sings songs he wrote himself about things he knows best: trucks, trains, hobos, labor, kids, and love. He echoes Woody Guthrie when he says about his songs, "I can never get them simple enough."

But often he does. For example, "It's Just a Rose" *sounds* simple, but like most of Larry's songs there's a lot of meaning under the surface. Here's part of it:

She had a rose tattoo
You know I have one too
So I asked her was it there for someone she once knew
Maybe it is she said
And maybe not she said
It's just a rose—it's just a rose.

In "Grandma's Patchwork Quilt," which celebrates this country's diversity and is one of Larry's most covered (music jargon for sung by others) songs, he sings:

Continued next page

Around the world people wait
For a day when there's no hate
And we treat each one like my grandma done
With her crazy patchwork quilt.

The song was included in MacMillan/McGraw-Hill's Reading and Language Arts series in 1993. In Larry's K-8 school program he sings The Music of Transportation: Trains, Trucks, Boats, Cars, Feet (e.g., "Why Don't Tow Trucks Haul Toes?"), and Airplanes. In his Grades 9-12 program he presents Songs of the American Labor Movement.

Another of Larry's songs, "I'm a Little Cookie," teaches kids of all ages a new attitude toward people with disabilities.

You can catch his poetry in "Tuscan Red Rose," a song about a female hobo whose graffiti Larry kept seeing on boxcar walls (usually painted in that reddish-brown paint that railroaders call tuscan red):

Ah! Come all you rounders and lovers of trains
Le' me tell ya 'bout something I've seen
A vagabond pearl, a freight-hoppin' girl
And I thought you could tell me just who she might be?
Chorus:
Now a woman will do ya' that way sometimes
Like a lyric low down in the prose
She won't let you be
You will never be free
Can you tell me the name
Of that Tuscan Red Rose?

After 30 years of singing that song to audiences across the country, Larry has yet to learn who she is—or was.

Larry also honors a 15-year-old girl who saved a trainload of passengers from a flooded Iowa river in 1881. *The Hobo Times* said, "The foremost tribute to Kate Shelley was written by Larry Penn. If you can listen to him sing it without shivering, you're made of granite."

I can't, especially not in the third verse:

Now the midnight mail was on the way
Run, Kate Shelley, run
Not more than a mile away
Run Kate Shelley, run
Inch-by-inch and tie-by-tie
She crawled across the trestle wide
Saved the passengers in time
Run, Kate Shelley, run.

Larry's songs have been covered by more than 40 performers, including Pete Seeger singing Larry's "I'm a Little Cookie" at Carnegie Hall.

After serving in World War II, Larry used his experience with heavy machinery to drive over-the-road trucks across North America. He joined the Teamsters, observed the world, and wrote down his ideas. In his mid-30s, when he was already supporting a family of five children, he taught himself to play the guitar.

"Once you get applause, it's like a disease," he warned fellow Milwaukee folksinger Lil Rev (Marc Revenson), who considers Larry his mentor.

In the mid-1960s, Larry and his wife, Pat, became involved in the Milwaukee Open Housing Marches led by Father James Groppi, who had been an assistant at their parish. Larry performs often for Labor causes, most recently at the May 3, 2011, commemoration of the 125th anniversary of the Bay View (WI) Rolling Mills Massacre.

2His song "So Long, Partner," a tribute to workers' struggles, is in the Wobblies' *Little Red Song Book, 36th Edition*. A 1989 cassette, *Stickin' with the Union: Songs from Wisconsin's Labor History* by Larry and Darryl Holter, was re-released on a CD in 2005, and one of his latest CDs is a live recording of him and the late Utah Phillips on May Day, 2006 at Milwaukee's Pabst Theater.

Since that Shawano Folk Festival in 2003, my wife, Judy, and I have seen Larry perform many times. Twice he's come to our house to perform private house concerts. He's released more CDs: *Railroad Queens of the Past* in 2004; *War Stories as Told to Larry Penn* in 2008, and *Around the Campfire with Lil Rev and Larry Penn* in 2010.

"Larry is legendary, a Wisconsin treasure," Mark Dvorak has told his audiences many times.

"On the guitar, Mark can play rings around me," Larry says. "But he doesn't."

Larry received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Woodstock (Ill.) Folk Fest in 2004, and Mark received it in 2008.

Larry weaves the theme of freedom through many of his songs. In "It's Time to Go," he sings:

The whistle on the midnight train is sweet tonight
Calling me the way an old time lover might
And every time the whistle moans it says to me
"I'll take you back to where your soul is free."

Lyrics reprinted with permission of Larry Penn.

Meandering with Madonna

An adult's garden of prose

By Madonna Dries Christensen

For many years, Henry Mitchell wrote a column called Earthman for *The Washington Post*. His death in 1993 left a void, not only among gardeners and horticulturists, but with those who take pleasure in language used to perfection. As one of the latter, I recently ambled through Mitchell's garden via his charming book *The Essential Earthman*.

One of his favorite lead-ins to digression was, "This might be the place to say . . . ." So this might be the place to say that while I enjoy the fruits of someone else's labor, I've never felt inclined to plant bulbs. I can identify a handful of flowers, but if my husband left me to weed his beds, he might lose his prize *whatchamacallit*.

Mitchell's dual interest in journalism and plants is rooted in childhood. As a youth in Tennessee, he interviewed neighborhood gardeners and studied seed catalogues.

His columns have a reverent tone and a *Joie de vivre*. If I encounter a paragraph that runs a tad long on genus detail, I continue, knowing there will be a witty or provocative punch line.

A collection of his metaphors and similes could be a book unto itself and render its reader "As pleased as a terrier that has gotten into the deviled eggs."

He describes a bronze Siamese dog he purchased for the garden: "Its legs come straight down like a piano's or, as they used to say, the ladies of Charlottesville."

There's a hilarious chapter about bringing house plants inside before winter comes. They take over the household, from small pots in the furnace room to five gallon buckets in the bathrooms, and cover every table, which caused the Mitchell's to eat standing up.

Mitchell was profoundly opinionated, but in an endearing way. When he realized he had grumbled and fretted too much, he added, "Zub, zub, zub." End of story.

He cites rules but admits he rarely follows them. "Nowhere in the book of life is it written that gardeners should have good sense," he advises.

More Mitchellisms:

- **In judging plants for the small garden, please follow this scale, which I have spent years perfecting and which is now correct.**
- If you want all red flowers, by all means please yourself.
- **Marigolds gain enormously in impact when used as sparingly as ultimatums.**
- During an ice storm, draw the shades on your garden.
- **Your garden will be perfect on the day after the undertaker takes you.**
- A load of manure is regarded by gardeners as a sign of divine favor.

Confessing that gardeners are never satisfied, he then expresses gratitude: "I was sorry because I had no *lorapetalum*, but then I met a man who had no snowdrop."

He spares not a word when praising plants he admires.

- Every garden should have a camellia, and this capital would be the better for it if all business stopped until every gardener got one planted.
- **No life is worth living without a vine and a fig tree.**
- Even the poorest tomato is improved beyond recognition when allowed to become dead ripe on the vine.
- **Mulleins: And oh for a lute of fire to sing their merits.**
- Peonies are the fattest, most scrumptious of all flowers, a rare fusion of fluff and majesty.
- **Sunflowers would do quite well as the national flower.**
- Our wild dogwood is utterly without fault and has so many startling virtues that I assume it was the last tree created, once Providence got the knack of things.

Mitchell adored his mutts, hounds, and terriers, and respected most beasts great and small. Wishing no harm, he disliked slugs, snails, rats, cats that carried off squirrels, and was more afraid of hornets and wasps than of lions. He fed the birds, rescued ants from drowning in his lily pond, encouraged visits from the neighborhood box turtle, and yearned for black skinks with yellow stripes and metallic blue tails.

“Toads are splendid, even though they look disgruntled,” he notes. “Dragonflies are more beautiful than seems reasonable and are nothing but good and fair; a sufficient reason for summer to exist.”

He confessed to not always doing things properly but nonetheless took pride in projects. Writing about a screen door he put up, he said, “It has those little Gothic arches. I seem to have put it up backwards, which is why, when you go to get out, you can’t get out very well.”

He boasted about the summerhouse he built, adding, “If that’s not too grand a name for four small wood posts and some one inch trellis and a brick floor.”

A friend of Mitchell’s reported that when Henry succumbed to cancer “It was in his garden, with dirt on his hands.”

I wondered what happened to the garden after his death. Then I came across this line he wrote. “Don’t grieve over a garden you’ve had to leave behind if you got everything out of it during your tenure.”

Henry Mitchell received—and gave—full measure. Readers know that Earthman’s garden was small in scale, but it will forever loom large and grand through the images created by this engaging man.

[Need a gift for a gardener? Consider *The Essential Earthman*, *One Man’s Garden*, and *Henry Mitchell On Gardening*.]

"Never order barbeque in a place that also serves quiche."

Lewis McDonald Grizzard (*They Tore Out My Heart and Stomped That Sucker Flat* (1982), *Don't Bend Over In the Garden, Granny — You Know Them Taters Got Eyes* (1988), and *I Haven't Understood Anything Since 1962 and Other Nekkid Truths* (1992)

Extra Innings #20

In which we celebrate writers, their enablers, and magnolia blossoms

Madison, Wisconsin June, 2011

Our stars: Madonna Dries Christensen, Den Adler, Jacob McLaughlin, Rex A. Owens, Scud Farcus, Jr., Janet Taliaferro, Ron Hevey, Laura Kahl, Bonnie Conway, and Jennifer Mayleigh Bell

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Back issues available at: www.dcs.wisc.edu/lsa/writing/extrainnings

Payers, Preyers and Pretenders

Where in the world do you find an agent or publisher?

By Rex A. Owens

Because we live in the internet world it is easier to find agents or publishers to query that in was just 10 years ago. We have excellent resources both on line and in print.

The first standard print resource is ***Writer's Market Deluxe Edition***, published annually by the Writer's Digest. The book boasts 3,500 listings for book publishers, consumer magazines, trade journals and literary agents and shows you how to use them. The section on Basics includes query letter guidelines and typical reasons for rejection.

Nineteen pages of agent listings provide the detailed information you need to decide to query an agent: e-mail address, web address, submission guidelines, what percentage of clients are unpublished writers, and genres they represent. Some agents provide tips on how to query them successfully. Never be satisfied with the information in the book, though; check the website before you query. Information changes, and agents stop taking new clients or move to other agencies.

Writer's Market also includes 184 pages of book publishers, including small presses. You get contact information, e-mail address, website, genres published, recent titles, and tips for your query. Again, always check the publisher's website for the most current information.

What do agents *really* want?

The second print resource, ***Guide to Book Publishers, Editors and Literary Agents,*** by Jeff Hermann, comes out annually from Source-books. Four sections cover various types of publishers and one deals with agents. There over 120 pages on advice for writers on 20 topics ranging from how a literary agency works to how to become a working writer. There are also sections on independent editors and a list of resources for writers.

The information on literary agents makes the *Guide* unique and worth purchasing. Agents respond to a list of questions covering: hobbies; categories/subjects they're most enthusiastic about; what they don't want; the best way for writers to spark their interest; what they represent by category (in percentage); how they would describe the client from hell and the perfect client; how and why they became agents; and what they think the future holds for writers, publishers and agents. The responses to these questions allow you to make a very good decision whether or not the agent is a fit. It also provides sufficient information to target your query letter to a particular agent.

Find lots of help online, too

While there are many online sources, there are two that I have used extensively. The first is **Predators & Editors** (www.invirtuo.cc/prededitors/.) This independent, free site contains a wealth of information. Topics include: agents & attorneys; awards; book publishers; chats; contests; conventions; definitions; jobs; rating criteria; resources; warnings and workshops.

The most valuable feature is the rating given for agents and publishers. If an agent or publisher gets a "not recommended" from P&E, you've just saved yourself time and potential headaches. The information on publishers will clearly indicate if it is a traditional publisher, vanity/subsidy publisher or self-publisher. However, you'll need further research before making a query by visiting the agent or publisher's website.

The final internet resource is **Authors Advance** (www.authorsadvance.com). Some services are free, and others require a subscription. The listing service is free and includes: agencies, agents, contests, events, markets, products, publishers, resources and services. The agents and publishers listing is alphabetic with website and location. The search begins by clicking on the website, which yields a one-page listing of contact information, genres, and detailed agent information.

Authors Advance can filter your searches based on nine categories, saving valuable time. The listing for publishers will indicate if it is a traditional; subsidy/vanity; self-publisher; or e-book press. You can also filter your publisher search using ten categories.

Select the resources you're most comfortable using and maximize your search potential. Happy hunting.

An Extra Innings special report:

Profile of Dad on his day

By Laura Kahl

"My Special Dad Fact Sheet" is one of my favorite kindergarten traditions. Every year, Mom (or a classroom volunteer - last year, I got to help) interviews the kids about their dads. Each child's answers will be pasted into their dad's father's day card. Here are some of my favorite answers.

How old is he?
I don't know. (Thinks for a minute.) He's 84.
I don't know... He doesn't tell me that since I was born.

How tall is he?
Twelve feet big.
84. I already told you.
About the size of the TV.
A lot taller than me.
He's up to the birdfeeder under the porch, I'm pretty sure.
This big. (She held her hands about a foot apart.)
Up to the beehive.

What does he do around his house?
Watches TV all the time.
Mostly cooking and throwing frisbees.
He would usually clean the house all the time.
And he says, "Paige, you make a mess!" (Paige is this little girl's big sister. I'm sure she'll be thrilled to see this.)
He's really lazy.

What is his favorite drink?
Oh, that's easy! Keystone Lite!

What is his favorite thing to eat?
Meat.

What is his favorite TV show?
About some news.

Does he cook?
A little bit. Mac and Cheese. The best in our whole family.

Where does he like to go?
That's hard. (Pause.) The bar.
The fishing pole store.

He is stronger than...
Glasses. (I think there has to be a story there.)
A peacock.
A board.
Maybe a dog.
A car.
This table.
A bug.

I think he is funny when...
… he does his jokes! One time he said, "Why did the chicken cross the road?" And I said, "To get a beer!" And he said, "Bingo!"
… he just woke up. He's cuckoo!
… he "cuts the cheese."
… he sleeps.

He is really good at...
… everything.

An older gentleman was on the operating table awaiting surgery, and he insisted that his son, a renowned surgeon, perform the operation. As he was about to get the anesthesia, he asked to speak to his son.

"Don't be nervous, son," he said. "Do your best and just remember, if it doesn't go well, if something happens to me, your mother is going to come and live with you and your wife...."

From one writer to another

Let's talk about rewrite

By Janet Taliaferro

Coach once said to me, "You know you're a writer when you write the same book twice—and intend to."

About three years ago I finished a novel. It had a rough birth and childhood. It started as a short story but, since I liked the characters, in a moment of folly I decided to give them their own book.

After wrestling the thing through three rewrites and a year with the able help of Chris DeSmet [UW-Madison Division of Continuing Studies' superb Writing Teacher], I thought the book was ready for publication. So I put it up on Amazon e-books in January.

Just about the time it went up on line and was read by all of two people, I received a call from a friend I haven't heard from in 35 years. She found me on Facebook, liked my stuff, and said she and a friend had started a publishing company. It's a POD [Print on Demand], but they do know how to market. Also, I would be getting some first hand, hands on, hands all over my work. Since this is the element severely lacking in most POD companies, I said "sure."

Along with the offer to publish came the requests for rewrite. For the last three months I have been struggling to reorder the book, change some characters and flesh out others while trying to keep it all straight.

I don't know how you start to rewrite, but I start by doing the laundry. Then I make the bed, clean the cat box and straighten the kitchen. If I had a dog I would walk it about this time.

Finally, I'm at the computer. I track my changes, because otherwise, I wouldn't know what I wrote, what I cut and what I just might want to add back.

I go into "writer's mode" -- perpetually distracted. I rarely speak to my family. While in this attitude of mental suspension, I keep an eye and ear out for things that don't ring true in my writing, including things I've read endless times.

I don't work well in a complete vacuum, so I let a few people read my stuff after about three drafts. If someone comments and suggests something and I immediately think, "Eureka" I change whatever it is. If I am doubtful, I wait until three people tell me the same thing. Then I swear and do some serious rewriting.

A long-time creative writing professor and I went back and forth over suggestions. I made extensive changes to the structure and some of the characterizations. In all honesty, it was an improvement. I have a better manuscript.

Then we got to style and voice. The professor objected from the beginning to my style. She took the first pages of the novel and edited them. I didn't like the edits, but also didn't want to rely on my own prejudices about taste. I sent drafts to five readers I trusted, and the verdict came back a unanimous, "don't change a thing."

I've been writing for 30 years and have a voice and a style that is mine. I have an ear for dialogue. In addition, the poetic muse does intrude a lot. My first novel sold reasonably well with no marketing, and I've published the best of my short stories and poetry. Some of these have even won money in the form of cashable checks.

In addition, some of the best advice I ever had was in graduate school from the head of the department, who told me, "You know, you don't have to change a word if you don't want to."

I informed the publishers I would not make the additional changes. They informed me they wouldn't take the manuscript without them. We dissolved the contract.

I'm back to negotiating with Create Space. I'll let you know what happens.

In the meantime I'm applying final polish. Every day I print out 20 pages of the text. I don't edit well on the screen, so I read the pages with my trusty red pen. I read for clarity, word choice and continuity. The following morning I plug any changes into the text on the computer and then print out the 20 pages to be edited that day.

Today I'm also e-mailing this to Coach. I'm sure he'll want a rewrite.

Coach's response: Nope. I tweaked it some, because that's how I prove to myself that I'm still here, but that was it.

Check Janet out at her website, www.janetmtaliaferro.com/

Growing Up Madison

What happened to my park?

By Ron Hevey

When I was eight in 1949, my park was an enormous expanse of green hugging the lake. Twenty-some years earlier a visionary, Michael Olbrich, had spent his own money to buy the property. He was captivated by the Capitol view and wanted to keep the space open rather than have it filled with houses. He donated the land to the City of Madison.

Olbrich Park was our neighborhood place for year-around kids' fun on a half a mile of lawn along Lake Monona. Dad had told me stories how when he was a boy Highway 51 drove through the park. He watched as its cattail marshes gave way to landfill to create the new lawn. Car headlights at night made that lawn resemble a washboard.

The ground was sturdy enough to support the East Side Business Men's Association Carnival for years. Did carnival folks realize that their Tilt-a-Whirl and top-heavy Ferris-Wheel were perched on rusting tin cans? We kids didn't care as long as our parents let us go to the carnival, albeit with warnings like, "You watch it; those rides over there aren't that safe," and "You be careful of those carnival workers from god-knows-where who could do god-knows-what to you."

All this went on before Madison Parks people put barges and cranes and giant pumps out from shore and spewed gunk from the bottom of Lake Monona to double the size of Olbrich Park's lawn.

This was also before the sandy beach and the lit-up ball fields and the tennis courts. When we played neighborhood baseball and football, we marked off the field with hats and coats, mitts and bats.

In wintertime when we tobogganed downhill from Lakeland Avenue, a good push off the ramp sent us careening out over Starkweather Creek on rails of ice donated by the sausage people at Oscar Mayer's. The hockey pond was easier to make; all they did was flood it in the fall and it was frozen solid by December.

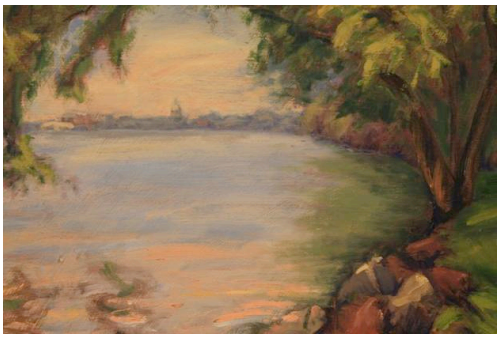
The Sunken Garden Shelters, signaled big changes, the onset of Olbrich Gardens. What were they doing to my park? Next came Herb Gardens, Rock Gardens, Wildflower Gardens, Perennial Gardens and Rose Gardens, finally a year-around indoor tropical garden.

Where once a polluting sugar beet factory had belched effluent, Olbrich Gardens created beauty, even adding an authentic Thai Temple on what had been godforsaken ground. Glittering gold woodwork withstands Wisconsin winters. Lots of folks have gotten married on the beautiful grounds.

But at what cost? Had they considered that the site was perfect for kids to trap muskrats, snakes and frogs? What were they doing to my park?

Once sleepy Starkweather Creek as it entered Lake Monona was commandeered to create a boat launch. Filled with massive rigs, the place resembles a NASCAR paddock. Across from Olbrich Park, fancy condos ate up the "Hungry, Hungry, Hungry," a car hop joint of the 60's. The penthouse goes for around a cool $1 million.

There's still a quiet place in Olbrich Park across from Olbrich Gardens and up from Starkweather Creek and not far from the lone bubbler on the corner of Atwood Avenue and Lakeland Avenue. The bubbler remains a landmark from my first days there and an absolute necessity before bottled water. A clump of original Cottonwood trees lines the shore nearby. You can sit and look across at the magnificent Madison skyline two miles away, the same one that got Michael Olbrich's attention. His view of the Capitol has been preserved.



E.I. goes to the movies
(and stays home to watch DVDs and streaming videos)

Thor kicks off summer movie season

By Jacob McLaughlin

Thor is the perfect film to start the season with. It's one of the rare superhero films that can appeal to fans and non-fans alike.

This is Marvel's best film since *Iron Man*. Kenneth Branagh directs a great Marvel adaptation. The way they balance the scenes between Asgard and Earth is perfect. The cinematography is beautiful in the Asgard scenes.

Chris Hemsworth is perfectly cast as Thor, the best superhero casting I've seen since Robert Downey Jr. as Iron Man. This film will make Hemsworth a star. He brings Thor to life. The scenes where he's trying to blend in on Earth are very funny. Even though he's been stripped of his powers, he's still a pretty big guy.

Anthony Hopkins is great as Odin. Tom Hiddleston does a great job as Loki-- deceiving and mischievious, a great villain. I can't wait to see him return in *The Avengers*.

The action isn't overdone. The fight between Thor, Loki, the Warriors Three and Sif against the Frost Giants is insanely cool. It's great to see Thor fighting them with Mjolnir. The visual effects are very well done. The Rainbow Bridge and the Destroyer are just two of the many awesome looking CG creations of this film.

Jeremy Renner makes a cameo as Hawkeye, and Stan Lee makes his funniest cameo to date. Be sure to stay after the credits, not just to hear Foo Fighters' 'Walk', but for the inevitable hint at what's coming next for the Avengers' scene.

Thor is one of my favorite films of the year. It's fun, exciting, well balanced and a great way to start off the summer movie season. I highly recommend you go and check it out.

Grade: **A-**

Here are two more of Jake's favorites.

The Dark Knight

The sequel surpasses the original

This is the best comic book film of all time. Christopher Nolan actually topped *Batman Begins*, very impressively. The main reason *The Dark Knight* is the superior film is Heath Ledger's portrayal of the Joker. Playing one of the most popular villains of all time can't be an easy task. Ledger pulled it off brilliantly. He really showed us who the Joker is and just how evil he can be. He's such a fascinating villain. He causes chaos for fun, just because he can, and that makes him all the more terrifying.

Christian Bale does a great job once again as the Caped Crusader. Most of the main cast is back, and they all do well. The two other new cast members are Aaron Eckhart and Maggie Gyllenhaal. Eckhart does a fine job as Harvey Dent, and Gyllenhaal is a good replacement for Katie Holmes, who was in the last film.

The action is spectacular. The opening bank robbery is a stunning set piece.

I can't wait for *The Dark Knight Rises*.

Grade: **A**

Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World

Graphic novels make smooth transition to big screen

How do you take a six volume epic into a two hour film? Get Edgar Wright to direct it. He handles this film perfectly. This film is a blast on every level. The characters are enjoyable to watch, the action is fun, the humor is well delivered and very funny.

Michael Cera does a good job as Scott. He captures Scott's quirkiness and mannerisms. Mary Elizabeth Winstead does well as Ramona. Ellen Wong is perfectly cast as Knives Chau. Most of Ramona's Seven Evil Exes are portrayed pretty well. Chris Evans and Brandon Routh are the best of the seven, both hilarious in their own ways.

Kieren Culkin steals every scene he's in as Scott's gay roommate, Wallace Wells.

The film is full of references to video games, movies and many other pop culture things. This being an Edgar Wright film, these are expected and welcomed as always. This film is a ton of fun. It's one of my top ten favorite films of all time. There's something new I catch every time I watch it. I highly recommend you see it and also read the graphic novels. They're just as fun.

Grade: **A**

Check out Jake's new movie blog at www.bloodandicecream.blogspot.com/

And now for something completely different... We introduce our newest film critic.

Doghouse adds misogyny to the zombie mix

By Scud Farcus, Jr.

Doghouse *(2009)*
Director: Jake West
Writer: Dan Shaffer
Stars: Danny Dyer, Noel Clarke and Emil Marwa

I am a rabid fan of zombie movies. I've seen such B-movie, low-budget staples as R*edneck Zombies* and *Dead Sno*w (the former is self-explanatory and the latter involves a group of perpetually resurrecting Nazi zombies who terrorize a group of vacationing German film buffs).

Perhaps the sole contribution of *Doghouse* to this well-mined genre may be adding the battle of the sexes into the mix.

The premise (is a premise really needed in a zombie film?) is that six male friends gather for a weekend of debauchery with the ostensible end of cheering up their friend Vince (Danny Dyer), who is recently divorced. Their plan centers on traveling to the remote village of Moodley, England, a small hamlet where the women outnumber the men 4 to 1. Much to the chagrin of the would-be Lothsarios, the women of the town all become pale, flesh-eating demons and devour the town's men shortly before their arrival.

Yes, the film does proffer an explanation for the origin of the monsters (of course it's the British government's fault). Yes, there is a high concentration of stage blood and intestines flying around. But what sets zombie flicks apart from other genres in my mind is that occasionally directors feel the desire to insert a theme. In the original *Dawn of the Dead*, it's commentary on consumerism. In *Dead Alive*, there's the struggle of an adult child trying to escape his overbearing mother (although most overbearing mothers are not 50' tall zombies who swallow their children whole). And in *Doghouse*, there are exaggerated gender stereotypes with a fair dose of misogyny.

The men, left to their own devices, are shiftless slobs who lock themselves out of their own houses; the women are, at best, shrieking harpies consistently disappointed by their men, or, at worst, trying to disembowel them with a meat cleaver.

The opening shot of *Doghouse* reveals a sleeping Neil in his bachelor digs sticking his hand into a Tupperware container filled with last night's dinner when he tries to shut off the alarm (after which he wipes the remains of dinner off on his comforter). I must say, remembering my years, I could relate (though I can also feel my wife shudder as she reads this.)

There are no conclusions, no character growth at the end, unless you count the epiphany by Vince that attempting to please women is futile and the best a man can hope for in life is to stand by one's mates in the face of an army of hell's concubines wielding axes and garden shears.

What pleases me in all this is that there is never any attempt to be subtle. You know what you're getting in a zombie film. The zombies aren't going to start growing sideburns or wearing eye shadow and rouge or start a love triangle over some high school girl. Romance amid zombies is, typically, brutally brief.

Unless you share my predilection for zombies being disemboweled by people with British accents, I would not recommend *Doghouse*. Even if you are a zombie aficionado, I doubt *Doghous*e will make your top five. However, I found the film to be a diverting use of 89 minutes while my wife was away during which I succeeded in not burning the house down or locking myself out with my keys in my other pants' pocket,.

That's all I really ask of a film on a lazy Saturday afternoon.

E.I. goes to concerts, too

Please welcome our new music critic, too.

The life of the indie rocker on the road

By Jennifer Mayleigh Bell

A recent Friday in Madison provided a memorable night of performances from *The Apache Relay, Tristen*, and *Ezra Furman and The Harpoons*. If you haven't met them, now's the time to get to know them.

The Apache Relay was first up to the stage, with lead singer and guitarist Michael Ford, Jr., guitarist and singer Mike Harris, keyboard and guitarist, Brett Moore, violinist, Kellen Winrich, and drummer, Aaron Early.

When lead singer/guitarist Ford met singer/guitarist Harris in college in 2006, a band was fated to form. Two years and two members later, *The Apache Relay* grabbed their aspirations and their instruments and hit the road and are now promoting their most recent album, *American Nomad*. Although the thought of touring is still a candy covered dream for the band, they know the realities of the work involved.

"Maybe we'll get to open up for someone one night and play for like a thousand people," Harris notes, "but then, one night we may open up for someone and play for five people. It's funny because the perception is so warped sometimes. I got a lot of text messages last week from some friends who said 'Congratulations man you made it!' and we're joking about it saying 'Did we make 'it'? No. We're still working hard and happy and thankful to have any opportunity to play a show."

"It's pretty awesome playing music every day,' Moore notes. "It's not always as glamorous as it seems, but it's still pretty awesome. "

"When we're driving all day, and crammed into hotel rooms, sometimes sleeping on the floor of the van, just that time on the stage connecting with people, it's totally worth it," Winrich says.

"It's one of those things where anyone can say when they are performing at this level, it's what we want to do," Ford says. "I don't know what I would be doing if I wasn't doing this, for me this is what it's about."

"As much as you choose this lifestyle this lifestyle also chooses you," Moore concludes.

The rest of the band concurs.

The Apache Relay took all the love they felt from Madison and gave it back on the stage with an entire set of timeless hit after hit leaving the audience aglow with their indie rock vibe.

Next to take the stage was Tristen Gaspodarek, lead singer of *Tristen*, promoting her latest CD, *Charlatans at the Garden Gate,* on the indie label American Myth Recordings. Her voice is sweet and clear, but her lyrics will hit you hard and leave you reeling.

"I've been singing since I could talk," she says, describing her sound as "Neo-Traditionalist Pop."

She shared the stage with guitarist Buddy Hughin.

"My dad is a guitarist so that is how I learned to play; I started when I was 14. I enjoyed college, my vocal studies, but I realized I just wanted to write my own lyrics and so I gave it a shot."

A CD and 11 tracks spun of gold later, Gaspodarek is out showing why her album is worth the listen.

Ezra Furman and The Harpoons, a Chicago born band, kept the spirit of good music alive and well carrying the evening to its close. They performed in support of their most recent album, *Inside the Human Bod*y, on the indie label Red Parlor Records.

The band features lead singer, Ezra Furman, bassist, Job Mukkada, guitarist, Andrew Langer, and Adam Abrutyn on drums. These road veterans are on their 5th tour, which when finished in America will continue on in Europe. Though the band is experienced, their sound still holds the enthusiasm of fresh out the gate artists.

"Our sound has evolved," Abrutyn says. "That happened when Andrew joined the band."

"Yeah it was me," Langer jokes. "They were playing one way and I said, 'Hey look guys you should be playing this way.'"

"I studied economics before I started doing this but-- here we are," Abrutyn says.

"I've been doing this since I was a baby," Langer says. "I was born into the biz. But we really have put a lot into this, it is great, we're having a lot of fun."

And so are the audiences.

Jokes straight from the man cave

With thanks to Steve Born

One day my housework-challenged husband decided to wash his Sweatshirt. Seconds after he stepped into the laundry room, he shouted to me, 'What setting do I use on the washing machine?'

'It depends,' I replied. 'What does it say on your shirt?'

He yelled back, 'OHIO STATE!'

And they say blondes are dumb....

A couple is lying in bed. The man says, 'I am going to make you the happiest woman in the world...'

The woman replies, 'I'll miss you..... '.

'It's just too hot to wear clothes today,' Jack says as he stepped out of the shower. 'Honey, what do you think the neighbors would think if I mowed the lawn like this?'

'Probably that I married you for your money,' she replied.

Q: What do you call an intelligent, good looking, sensitive man?
A: A rumor

Dear Lord,
I pray for Wisdom to understand my man;
Love to forgive him; and Patience for his moods.
Because, Lord, if I pray for Strength, I'll beat him to death.
AMEN

Q: Why do little boys whine?
A: They are practicing to be men.

Q: What do you call a handcuffed man?
A: Trustworthy. .

Q: What does it mean when a man is in your bed gasping for breath and calling your name?
A: You didn't hold the pillow down long enough.

Q: Why do men whistle when they are sitting on the toilet?
A: It helps them remember which end to wipe..

Q: How do you keep your husband from reading your e-mail?
A: Rename the email folder 'Instruction Manuals'

While creating husbands, God promised women that good and ideal husbands would be found in all corners of the world. Then He made the earth round.

Persistence pays

We mark the passing of novelist Dick Wimmer, whose novel, *Irish Wine*, was finally published after 25 years of submissions and 162 rejections.

In the *New York Times* review, C.D.B. Bryan called the book a "taut, finely written, exhaustingly exuberant first novel."

Despite good reviews, the novel didn't sell much. Wimmer went back to his teaching job but kept writing, and two sequels followed, the well-reviewed 1998 comic novel *Boyne's Lassie* and *Hagar's Dream*, published with the two earlier books as *Irish Wine Trilogy* in 2001.

Don't forget, after Dean Koontz sold the first short story he ever wrote, he got 75 rejections before selling his next one. Now he's one of the most highly paid authors in the world.

First Person Singular

Homily for Birds

By Tom Crawford

I grew up on a farm in Michigan and later in California so birds were always around me. My father was a chicken fancier. My mother raised Barred Rocks for the eggs. Valley Quail wandered through our yard. I knew the sweet song of the Meadowlark in our neighbor's alfalfa.

The memory that's followed me all of my life though was walking with my uncle in a field of corn stubble in Michigan. It was a sunny day. I was eight years old and on my first pheasant hunt. I didn't see the bird flush, but the explosion of the shotgun, I remember that, how it startled me.

What came next wasn't about feeling bad for the dead bird, but the shock of its beauty when my uncle laid it warm in my hands. Its colored feathers astonished me: the white ring, the iridescent blue-greens over the neck and head, the luminous red patches and yellow beak. And, oh my, those long, spotted tail feathers.

If one can have post-traumatic-shock from beauty, mine was for that male pheasant. I'm certain it was the beginning of my life as a birder.

That there are still 800 different kinds of birds in our country is pretty amazing, but something else that amazes more, there are 61 million birders watching them. That's a lot of packed lunches and binoculars. And my guess is that these are mostly ordinary people like you and me who simply love birds. I can't explain in scientific terms bird habitat, the impact of invasive species, migration patterns or any of the rest of it, which is vast and very important.

But I do know that if we don't figure out soon how to reconnect people with the natural world-- I mean the truck driver, the school teacher, clerk, salesmen-- then all the smart science in the world won't save our beloved bird or us from extinction.

Consumption is killing us and killing the planet. Conservation begins with the heart. That's what my book *The Names of Birds* is really about. Right now fully half of those 800 birds are either in trouble, in decline or are on the so-called Red List for endangered species.

It was something in an article in the *NY Times* in 2009 about the destruction of bird habitat that probably began my journey as an activist. It wasn't my lack of awareness of endangered species and the causes, no, it was the density of metaphor—that's what was missing in the article —that mysterious quality of language poetry is.

Birds are poems after all. They remind us that only by our capacity for wonder are we saved.

Then I thought of the line, really a mantra for me, "Birds are holes in heaven through which a man may pass."* It was the warm pheasant in my young hands again. I took it as a call to action. I've always written bird poems so why not dedicate a whole book to birds? This was something I could do. Something I must do.

*Walter Anderson

Tom's collection of poems, The Names of Birds, *will be published soon. Watch this newsletter for information on how to get a copy. Until then, here's a taste.*

FOR THE CERTAIN DARK DAYS

The angel that might
knock you off your horse
on the way
into the noisy city
is no match for the tanager
landing on the suet.
You'll look in vain
to find him anywhere
in the Gospels. Not one
parable about the necessity
for beauty if we are
to go on.

Breeding plumage
to dazzle the female
into making more birds
like this one should have us
all running to put up more
peanut butter.

Vox Populi

(that's you, folks)

Christensen joins chorus of cheers for cursive

I agree with Sharon Young's sentiments about handwritten letters [last issue]. I treasure the family letters I have. For the past three years or so, I have regularly written letters to each of my two granddaughters (grandson isn't old enough for them yet). They're one page, large font; stories about my childhood or their mother's childhood, or the seasons, holidays, riddles, jokes, illustrated with colorful clip art. Mom saves the letters in plastic sheet protectors in notebooks. Sometimes when I visit, we girls page through the notebooks. I know they will enjoy these letters years and years from now.

Madonna Dries Christensen

And speaking of Madonna...

Our very own meanderer had two stories accepted by Silver Boomer Books for their anthology: *The Harsh and the Heart--Patriots Dream* (due out in August). I'm happy to say that both excellent pieces, "One County's Greatest Generation" and "Consider The Poppies Of The Field," have appeared in *E.I.* and received a great deal of praise from you-all.

Prolific novelist **Rosemary Hovey Everson** has three novels published, *Fact or Fool, Outburst of Love,* and *The Days of Carina Fielding Minuet*. You can find details on her webiste, www.rosemaryeverson.com.

DINNER MOON

The moon is invited
to dine in the garden
say grace with hydrangeas
break bread with the rose

slow dance with lilies
waltz with carnations
change wine into moonbeams
to string for night's necklace

when moon is full
brush crumbs from the pansies
make a toast to alyssum
and follow stars home.

Bonny Conway

A few final funnies

Thanks to Wally Littman

Ø I didn't say it was your fault, I said I was blaming you.

Ø Why does someone believe you when you say there are four billion stars, but check when you say the paint is wet?

Ø Why do Americans choose from just two people to run for president and 50 for Miss America ?

Ø Behind every successful man is his woman. Behind the fall of a successful man is usually another woman.

Ø A clear conscience is a sign of a bad memory.

Ø You do not need a parachute to skydive. You only need a parachute to skydive twice.

Ø A diplomat is someone who can tell you to go to hell in such a way that you will look forward to the trip.

Ø Hospitality: making your guests feel at home, even when you wish they were.

Ø I discovered I scream the same way whether I'm about to be devoured by a great white shark or if a piece of seaweed touches my foot.

Ø Some cause happiness wherever they go. Others whenever they go.

Ø I used to be indecisive. Now I'm not sure.

Ø When tempted to fight fire with fire, remember that the Fire Department uses water.

Coach insists on having the last word--next page

Coach's Bullpen Bloviations

Say it ain't so, John!

Did Steinbeck invent his travels with Charley?

By Marshall J. Cook

Journalists, Steinbeck scholars, and even Steinbeck's own son have been casting doubt on the authenticity of the famous author's most beloved books, *Travels with Charley*, recently. They're saying he made most of it up!

Travels is supposed to be a factual account of a cross-country journey an aging, ailing Steinbeck took in the fall of 1960, to get back in touch with the real America.

We know for sure that he outfitted a three-quarter-ton pickup truck and set out from his home in Sag Harbor, New York with only his French poodle, Charley, for company, determined to talk to the folk he met along the way.

The result, *Travels with Charley: In Search of America*, published in 1962, became a best-seller. I recently reread it and thought it held up remarkable well as storytelling and as prophecy about where America was headed.

It isn't a pleasant prophecy, but it's a great road trip and a great read.

But now, even his own son, John, is convinced his father never talked to most of the folks he wrote about. "He just sat in his camper and wrote all that [expletive deleted]," he told *New York Times* writer Charles McGrath for a story published April 3, 2011.

Those great dialogues with the folksy New England farmer or the Shakespearean actor outside Alice, North Dakota? Spun out of the same imagination that gave us *The Grapes of Wrath, East of Eden*, and Steinbeck's other great novels.

On October 12, according to Bill Steigerwald, writing in the monthly magazine *Reason*, Steinbeck was nowhere near Alice, North Dakota, where he claimed to be. He was 300 miles to the west, staying in a comfortable motel, not in his camper.

He stayed in motels-- and even luxury hotels-- a lot, according to Steigerwald, formerly a writer for the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. And he wasn't sleeping with Charley. His wife, Elaine, was with him for more than half the trip, Steigerwald says.

"Virtually nothing he wrote in 'Charley' about where he slept and whom he met on his dash across America can be trusted," Steigerwald concludes.

"I didn't set out to blow the whistle," he adds. "I kind of like the old guy."

Steigerwald performed what he called "grunt journalism," comparing the travel account in the book against newspaper stories, biographies, and Steinbeck's own letters. They didn't match up. "Anybody with a library card and a skeptical gene in his body could do what I did," he says.

Bill Barich made his own journey across the country and, in 2010, published *Long Way Home: On the Trail of Steinbeck's America*. "I'm fairly certain that Steinbeck made up most of the book," McGrath quotes him as saying in the *Times*.

Steinbeck was sick and depressed and trying to recapture his youth," Barich concludes. "But I still take seriously a lot of what he said about the country. His perceptions were right on the money about the death of localism, the growing homogeneity of America, the trashing of the environment. He was prescient about all that."

Whether he kept careful notes and tape-recordings and transcribed literal truth on the pages of *Travels*, made the whole thing up out of a fiction writer's imagination and a wealth of experience, or, as is likely, created something between those two poles, it's a damn fine book, to this day full of truth about America, Americans, and humanunkind.

As any good novelist does-- and Steinbeck was a great one-- he may have had to lie to reach the higher truth. Reality may not have told a good enough story, so he had to invent a better one.

So label it as fiction, read, mark, and inwardly digest this fine book and learn from it, and give thanks for the good, suffering, flawed man who was brave enough to write it.

This column will appear in a new online publication, Kaat's Cross Country Chronicle. *For details, stay tuned to this newsletter.*