EXTRA

INNINGS

In which we celebrate writers, their enablers, and The World Serious, should they ever get to it

#36 Madison, Wisconsin October, 2012

BULLPEN BLOVIATIONS
MARSHALL J. COOK, EDITOR-IN-COACH

Lies, damn lies, and statistics*

Saturday, September 15, 2012-- a day that will live in infamy-- at least for one baseball player.

Jose Reyes, shortstop for the Miami Marlins, bobbled a routine ground ball, allowing Cincinnati Reds batter Drew Stubbs to reach first base safely. The official scorer ruled the play an error-- one of thousands of errors committed in the history of big league baseball.

The 500,000th, to be exact.

That's right, somebody counted. Somebody counts *every*thing in baseball.

Major Leaguers have committed half a million errors, and Jose Reyes happened to commit number 500,000. If he'd made his error about four minutes later, the honor would have gone to somebody else.

So, what does this mean in the great scheme of things? Some choices:

a) Jose Reyes is a lousy fielder.
b) Jose Reyes is one unlucky dude.
c) Jose Reyes' mama loves him anyway.
d) Absolutely nothing.

It for sure doesn't mean 'a.' Jose Reyes is a major leaguer, one of the best of the best. He plays the toughest position, and he handles more plays than many other shortstops because he's quick and has good range (meaning he gets to more baseballs that a slower shortstop would).

Tommy John, a fine fielding pitcher in his day, once made three errors on one play. Bob Brenly, an excellent catcher playing out of position at third base, made four errors in one inning.

For the record (and that's what this piece is all about), on June 14, 1876, Boston second baseman Andy Leonard earned his place in history by making nine errors in a nine-inning game.

Herman Long was a competent shortstop and fine hitter who played for Boston at the turn of the century. He was good enough to play for 16 years in the bigs, long enough to make 1,096 errors, the most of any player in history.

Billy Buckner, another marvelous hitter and okay defenseman, will be forever remembered-- and in some sections of Boston reviled-- for letting a ground ball roll through his legs in game six of the 1986 World Series for the Red Sox against the Mets. It's one of the most (in)famous boots in history-- but NOT one of the half million. (Post-season games don't count in this tally.)

Baseball fans are known for their love of statistics. Some managers make their decisions based on them, bringing computer print-outs into the dugout. (See last year's baseball movie, *Moneyball*). Others still rely on intuition. (See this year's baseball flick, *Trouble With the Curve*.)

Love 'um or not, we sure do keep track of statistics. How else would I know that 92,700 dog licenses were issued in New York City last year, down five percent from the previous year?

Ah-ha! A trend!

Here's another trend: The average New York City worker has 12 more square feet of office space this year than the previous year.

Shocking! Alarming! Why, if this trend continues, in just a few decades, the average city worker's office will be roughly the size of Yankee Stadium.

This sort of idiocy, known as the error of extrapolation, is just one way we can lie with statistics. Manipulating unemployment and crime rates are two favorite areas for such shenanigans. Mark Twain illustrated the idiocy of such "logic" in *Life on the Mississippi* (1884):

"In the space of 176 years the Lower Mississippi has shortened itself 242 miles. ...Therefore, any

calm person, who is not blind or idiotic, can see that in the Old Oölitic Silurian Period, just a million years ago next November, the Lower Mississippi was upwards of 1,300,000 miles long, and stuck out over the Gulf of Mexico like a fishing-pole. And by the same token any person can see that 742 years from now the Lower Mississippi will be only a mile and three-quarters long, and Cairo [Illinois] and New Orleans will have joined their streets together ..."

Just the other morning I read that President Jimmy Carter had set a record of his own, having survived his 11,554th day as an ex-president, besting the previous record held by Herbert Hoover. Carter's not the *oldest* living ex-president in history, just the one who's been out of office and still above ground the longest.

What does that tell us about the respective presidencies of Carter and Hoover or of the price of cardigan sweaters in Madagascar? Absolutely nothing.

Do you keep statistics on your writing career? Do you know how many rejections you've garnered over the years, for example, or what percentage of your submissions have been accepted? If so, for the sake of your sanity and the likelihood that you'll continue to write and submit your work, I beg you-- STOP COUNTING!

I'll bet I've gotten more rejections than you. And like poor Andy Leonard, I've been known to get a lot of them in a hurry, as many as three in one day. But then, I've been sending stuff out for over 40 years now-- lots and lots of stuff. I may be slow, but I'm steady, and I've covered a lot of ground. My rejection slips laid end to end would probably be as long as the Mississippi River in the Old Oölitic Silurian Period.

I used to keep my rejection slips. One day I burned them. Oh, what a great day *that* was!

My fantasy baseball team, the Madison Marvels, are mired in the second division, and my Pittsburgh Pirates have faded from playoff contention, so I'm already looking forward to next year, when some lucky fellow will enter the record books as the 100,000th batter hit by a pitched ball.

* *"There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics," a remark attributed to British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli and made popular by Mr. Twain.*

Extra Innings #36

Madison, Wisconsin October, 2012

This month's All-Star lineup:
Madonna Dries Christensen, Rex Owens,
Esther M. Leiper-Estabrooks, Ron Hevey,
Carol Hornung, Den Adler, Pat Goetz
Film Critic: Jake McLaughlin
Word Whisperer: Jan Kent
Cryptologist: Janice Kaat
World's cutest baby: Liliana Lenore Cook
Head of office security: Pat Downes
Web Weavers: Celeste Anton, Emily Baker
Internetters: Steve Born, Larry Tobin
Poet: Norma Sundberg,
Editor-in-Coach: Marshall J. Cook

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Deadline for next issue:
Saturday, October 20th

FOR THE LOVE OF WORDS
ESTHER M. LEIPER-ESTABROOKS

That's just nonsense!

"Nonsense!" we say, making pronouncements on opinions that displease us. Yet nonsense can make us think "out of the box" and, if we're receptive, offers happy laughs. Characteristics include the following: exaggerations, tongue twisters, puns, made-up words, impossibilities presented as true, and crazy contradictions. Here's a nameless, anonymous classic:

'Twas a bright October morning last December in July.
The moon lay thick upon the ground; the mud shone in the sky.
Flowers were singing sweetly and the birds were in full bloom
As I went down to the cellar to sweep an upstairs room.
The time was Tuesday morning on Wednesday just at night
When I saw, a thousand miles away, a house just out of sight.
The walls projected backwards, the front around the back.
It stood between two more plus it was whitewashed black.

The next example is by Mary Freeman and, incidentally, also rhymes 'sight' with 'night.'

THE OSTRICH IS A SILLY BIRD

The ostrich is a silly bird
With scarcely any mind.
He often runs so very fast
He leaves himself behind.
And when he gets there, has to stand
And hang about all night
Without a blessed thing to do
Until he comes in sight.

This next rhyme comes from a collection of autograph-book sayings to use if you can't think up your own:

You love yourself, you think you're grand.
You go to the movies and hold your hand,
You put your hand around your waist
And when you get fresh you slap your face.

For more nonsense read John Ciardi, Roald Dahl, Edward Lear, Laura Richards, Carolyn Wells, and countless others.

The following is from Richard R. Espy:

L'ENFANT GLACE

When baby's cries grew hard to bear
I popped him in the Frigidaire.
I never would have done it if
I'd known he'd be frozen stiff.
My wife said, "George, I'm so unhappe [sic]
Our darling's now completely frappe!"

Life's certainty is ***uncertainty,*** so I address the conundrum in my own verse:

DIRECTIONS, PLEASE

Am I further or farther or nearer than not?
If I'd a map would I know what I've got?
Am I hither or yonder, far into the blue,
While if I am lost—then what shall I do?

Is my hinder forward and my forward behind?
Alas, the blind lead the blinder-than-blind!
Yet faith in some future for us is a must;
Let God release spirit when body is dust.

Will I be an angel or else a pale ghost;
Among the heavenly--or earth-haunting host?
It's silly to speculate and futile to fear:
Yet how fares my spirit? I fear I'm no seer!

Dr. Seuss, best known for delightful nonsense, can also offer practical advice:

You have brains in your head.
You have feet in your shoes.
You can steer yourself any
direction you choose, You're
on your own, And you know
what you know. And YOU are
the one who'll decide where to go.

Go where? For me, to the garden. My rows are bursting, but so is a fat intruder partial to sunflower shoots and basil. Indeed, Chuck has his own tongue-twister: "If a woodchuck could chuck wood, how much wood could a woodchuck chuck?" Etc. We caught the fellow in a Have-a-Heart Trap then freed him in a far meadow where he waddled off, gait snappy and happy. In fact, this mini-drama inspired me to pen crit-lit verses ready for a future column. Not all poetry is serious, religious, or patriotic; a good portion is "just-for-fun"- (and certainly more-so than weeding!)

Coach's note: Please see the Bullpen Blurbs on page 12 for a correction from last month's FOR THE LOVE OF WORDS column.

APHORISM: A short, pointed sentence that expresses a wise or clever observation or general truth

Larry Tobin got this from Mark Baker who no doubt poached it from the Internet

1. The nicest thing about the future is ... that it always starts tomorrow.

2. Money will buy a fine dog, but only kindness will make him wag his tail.

3. If you don't have a sense of humor, you probably don't have any sense at all.

4. Seat belts are not as confining as wheelchairs.

5. A good time to keep your mouth shut is when you're in deep water.

6. It takes so little time for a child who is afraid of the dark to become a teenager who wants to stay out all night.

7. Business conventions are important ... because they demonstrate how many people a company can operate without.

8. Why is it that at class reunions you feel younger than everyone else looks?

9. Scratch a cat and you will have a permanent job.

10. No one has more driving ambition than the teenage boy who wants to buy a car.

11. There are no new sins; the old ones just get more publicity.

12. There are worse things than getting a call for a wrong number at 4 a.m. - like, it could be the right number.

13. No one ever says "It's only a game" when their team is winning.

14. I've reached the age where 'happy hour' is a nap.

15. Be careful about reading the fine print ... there's no way you're going to like it.

16. The trouble with bucket seats is that not everybody has the same size bucket.

17. In about 40 years we'll have thousands of old ladies running around with tattoos and looking like a phone book left out in the rain? And rap music will be the Golden Oldies!

18. Money can't buy happiness - but it's more cozy to cry in a Cadillac than in a Yugo.

19. After 60, if you don't wake up aching in every joint, you're probably dead.

20. Always be yourself because the people that matter don't mind ... and the ones that mind don't matter.

21. Life isn't tied with a bow ... but it's still a gift.

and always remember and never forget:

Politicians and diapers need to be changed often-- and for the same reason.

MEANDERING WITH MADONNA
Madonna Dries Christensen

Glass children

October is Down Syndrome Awareness Month. As the grandmother of one child with DS and one with autism, awareness is second nature. These children have an older sister, so I'm also aware that siblings of children with special needs often have difficulty coping with the association.

We all wear labels today. My oldest granddaughter's label reads: *typical child*. Sixteen months older than her sister and four years older than her brother, she is accustomed to therapists coming to the house to spend time with her siblings.

At age nine, and beginning to grasp that they need extra help, she's both protective of them and resentful of the attention they receive.

This child makes the honor roll. She has an expanded vocabulary, is gabby, a good listener, eager to learn. She's kind and generous; given to writing notes signed with hearts and xoxo and sometimes including a dollar bill. She's alternately sweet, sassy, confident, and insecure. She frets about change. She has a quick humor and likes playing pranks.

She's a Girl Scout; plays chess and piano, enjoys hiking, swimming, climbing trees, building things, and is an imaginative artist, writer, and storyteller. In a verse she wrote in third grade, she described herself as curious and smart.

She attends a therapy group for students who have siblings with special needs. It's an outlet, but when sensory overload brings a meltdown, she complains that no one listens to her; no one pays attention to her. Of course, we do listen; we do pay attention, but she's forgotten that a visiting grandparent played with her all day, that the whole family applauded one of her stage shows in which she was the solo performer, or that she spent the day with her aunt and rode her horse.

In a video on the Internet, Alicia Arenas talks about her 1970's childhood as the older sister of an autistic brother and another with a terminal illness who died at age four. The child with autism was not diagnosed until age 13, so prior to that the parents had no guidance. This overwhelmed them and frustrated the older child.

Arenas calls the siblings of children with special needs *Glass Children* and explains that this does not mean they're fragile. Instead, they're strong, reliable, independent, and often willingly shoulder the responsibility of making life easier for their parents. When someone says, "You need to be good and help Mommy," they take that to heart.

Because these children appear to be doing well, busy parents might look right through them—like clear glass. If asked how they're doing, these kids will say they're okay. Arenas warns that they are probably not okay. They are at risk.

Search online for Arenas and watch her video. Then consider a family you know that is meeting the constant demands of someone with special needs. Think of special needs in a broad sense. The family might be dealing with a teenager who's involved with a gang, or a live-in grandparent with dementia. Maybe a parent is away on military duty. The children in these households would benefit from individual attention. Take a child to a movie, or shopping; teach a craft or skill, help with homework, or seek his help—maybe lessons in using your new iPad.

Don't look *through* children, look *at* them; let them know you're listening. All children have special needs.

Payers, Preyers & Pretenders
Rex Owens

Gaining perspective

Recently I had the first thorough professional edit of the galley for my debut novel, *Murphy's Troubles*. My publisher produces a hard copy galley with the book cover artwork so that I received a faux book.

To see my manuscript look like a book is a very heady experience for a first time author like me. The first day I just looked at it. I gave myself three full days before I mustered the discipline and objectivity to study the edits in the margins.

When I did look, the editing was about story, consistency, point of view and believability. I suppose I was expecting something more like copy editing. The edits were meant to sharpen and polish not only the writing but the story.

I also received an electronic document of the galley, which I printed out and read with the notes from the faux book galley by my side for reference. One comment that appeared frequently was – 'repetitive, readers already know this.'

This comment forced me to take the perspective of a first time reader, and I found that the editor was right. I have the habit of repeating material because from the character's perspective it was part of the story. From the reader's perspective, once the information is presented it's there and shouldn't be repeated.

For example, Ian's motivation for joining the IRA is the death of his best friend at the hands of British soldiers. I repeated that scene four times with minor variations on the reason for relating that scene. While that approach worked from different character's perspective, it doesn't work at all from the readers' perspective.

I combed through the novel and cut about 20 pages or about 7% of the book. Some may think that's draconian, but I think it's a major improvement. You would expect a writer would always have the reader in mind – I didn't - maybe that's part of being a novice.

Preparing a manuscript for publication is not what I expected it would be. Yet it's an amazing learning and creative experience. What editorial experiences have you had? Send an email to Marshall and share them with us.

Cryptology for Writers
Janice Kaat

I love s to read other writer's quotes. I get some great ideas from them. Sometimes just the way they string their words together reminds me of music. At other times I can imagine images and hearing sounds in the night. Isn't that what writing is all about? Open the imaginations of your readers and take them to places they've never been before.

The following is a quote from a famous author. Reading the quote gave me a desire to know the author and his writing better. The answer and names of anyone who sends in the translated quote will appear in next month's issue.

T IZQBU DQKB IZKUC TFEZ EDTC ULKHFXCC LFU ILTE AZK LF XPDZ, LFU TA LF XPDZ CZQFUXU, FZ YLEEXK DZI ALTFEBO, T IZQBU CXFU ZEDXK IZKUC EZ EXBB, EZ YLKPD, EZ ATRDE, EZ PKXLEX L CXFCX ZA DQFRXK AZK BTAX EDLE RFLIC TF QC LBB. (KTPDLKU IKTRDE)

Jan Kent *is*
The Word Whisperer

Wow – found a new poetry word the other day. It was in *The Other* by David Guterson (good novel) in a chapter about teaching poetry. I was pretty excited, and I'm not even a poet. The word was "scansion."

Before I whipped out the dictionary I mused a little about what it might mean. I'm sure I've never read the word before. It seemed mystic, evocative, alluring.

I looked up the definition. Well, rats. It means "the analysis of verse into its rhythmic components." You poets already knew that, but I was disappointed.

Coach's query: What other words sound a lot nicer than their meanings? Have you been disappointed when you learned the meaning of a word? Send 'em on in so we can share them.

Punishment

Sent in by our pal Barry Reszel

When chemists die, we barium.

Jokes about German sausage are the wurst.

I know a guy who's addicted to brake fluid. He says he can stop any time.

I stayed up all night to see where the sun went. Then it dawned on me.

This girl said she recognized me from the vegetarian club, but I'd never met herbivore.

I**'m reading a book about anti-gravity. I just can't put it down.**

Why were the Indians here first? They had reservations.

I didn't like my beard at first. Then it grew on me.

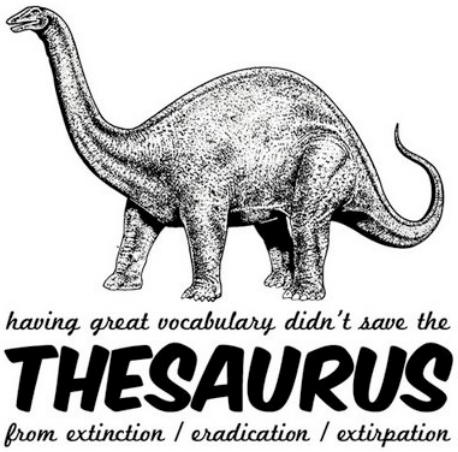
Did you hear about the cross-eyed teacher who lost her job because she couldn't control her pupils?

Broken pencils are pointless.

I tried to catch some fog, but I mist.

What do you call a dinosaur with an extensive vocabulary?

A thesaurus.



England has no kidney bank, but it does have a Liverpool.

I used to be a banker, but I lost interest.

I dropped out of communism class because of lousy Marx.

I got a job at a bakery because I kneaded dough.

Haunted French pancakes give me the crêpes.

Velcro — what a rip off!

A cartoonist was found dead in his home. Details are sketchy.

The earthquake in Washington obviously was the government's fault.

ESSAYS FROM IMAGES
DEN ADLER

Into my 70th year: what now?

In their book *Optimal Aging: Get Over Getting Older*, Albert Ellis and Emmett Velten write, "Our greatest limitation as humans is a finite lifespan. We can say 'It's never too late,' but someday it is. We can say 'There's always tomorrow,' but then there isn't. … Someday you may look back and realize that you did not set the world on fire, and now you're almost out of matches."

And so I am. When coworker Kathy Poole honored my train-photography hobby with this birthday cake she decorated for me in 1976, I was 33, still young enough to tackle the world's problems and set it on fire. I had lots of time.

But a few weeks ago a classmate died, and on October 13 I will turn 69 and begin my 70th year, two reminders that I'd better decide what I want to do when I grow up. And yes, it is a shock. I have many interests, but I no longer have time or energy for all of them.

Some, in fact, seem frivolous on a planet that causes its creatures so much emotional and physical pain. My own problems cut short my social work career decades ago, and I've never narrowed down an idea of what I can contribute in its place. My photography and writing have pleased some. Marshall Cook described my novel, *To Become a Priest—a Love Story,* as having "Vivid characters embroiled in the most meaningful conflict there can be," the highest of praise. He felt I hadn't wasted my time.

So the question I've been struggling with is, how shall I best spend the time I have left? I like the idea of never totally retiring from work, but now that I'm no longer employed I want to work on my terms and on my time. I can do that with my writing, I think, but toward what goals? I also want to spend a good share of my time—not all, though it's tempting—on things I enjoy: visiting relatives and friends, bicycling, photography, listening to and playing music, and reading on my porch.

I don't believe in gods or an afterlife, but I am not afraid of death. I do fear having to endure a long and painful dying, however, and even when I was a conservative Catholic studying to become a priest I did not agree with my Church, or with most of society, that suicide, or even assisted suicide in certain circumstances, is a bad thing.

I've always been dismayed at our refusal to treat members of our own species as humanely as we do our animals, and I've wondered why we insist on keeping people alive—at great monetary and emotional expense—to endure only suffering in their last days, weeks, months, even years. At my age, this has become an important issue, and it's one I've decided to write about.

In 1968 I gave up my religious beliefs, finally coming to trust my own observations and deciding that many things good-hearted people taught me were mistaken. I don't care to proselytize my non-belief, but I have seen nonbelievers suffer from feelings of isolation where religion pervades our culture in so many ways. I'd like to help them know they aren't alone, that there are other people, good people, who don't believe in gods. So I've decided to write about this issue, too, and perhaps I can help other nonbelievers come to an intellectual and emotional resolution that will increase their happiness in life.

This seems to be the only life we will have, and most of us want it to be long and happy. It makes sense for us, then, to help each other exist more happily, because we live on Earth together, and our own well-being affects others'. Each of us carries a unique combination of knowledge and skill, and while we are under no obligation from the universe to use them, we will probably be happier if we do. I'll try to use mine to point out a humanistic philosophy of life, one that includes a much-needed—if humankind is to survive—live-and-let-live attitude toward oneself and others.

So I have a third goal: to counter the stridency of so much atheistic literature with my own book. The working title: *Things to Tell Your Kids About Gods and the Many Religions*.

Life is complex, and new problems are always coming at us, so my goals are always subject to change. But these three, I think, are worth working toward as I start my 70th year.

Speaking words of wisdom...

Money can't buy you happiness .... But it does bring you a more pleasant form of misery.
- Spike Milligan
<><>
Until I was thirteen, I thought my name was **SHUT UP** .
- Joe Namath
<><>
I don't feel old. I don't feel anything until noon. Then it's time for my nap.
- Bob Hope
<><>
I never drink water because of the disgusting things that fish do in it..
- W. C. Fields
<><>
Don't worry about avoiding temptation. As you grow older, it will avoid you.
- Winston Churchill
<><>
Maybe it's true that life begins at fifty .. But everything else starts to wear out, fall out, or spread out..
- Phyllis Diller
<><>
If it tastes good, spit it out.
-your cardiologist

Pico Iyer said: it

"The less conscious one is of being 'a writer,' the better the writing. And though reading is the best school of writing, school is the worst place for reading. Writing should ... be as spontaneous and urgent as a letter to a lover, or a message to a friend who has just lost a parent ... and writing is, in the end, that oddest of anomalies: an intimate letter to a stranger."

FIRST PERSON SINGULAR
PAT GOETZ

Peace and war on Erey Yom Kippur

Coach's note: I originally published Pat's fine essay in Creativity Connection *in 2004 and reprint it now in honor of Yom Kippur, which was September 26.*

On Erev (or "Eve") Yom Kippur, I went alone to Jerusalem's Great Synagogue for Friday night's opening service. I wore a dress, the second time since last Yom Kippur, and a friend tied my special scarf, as it's respectful to wear a hat or scarf in the synagogue. The streets were almost empty when I left at twilight, myself and two or three others in eight blocks. It was a truly pleasant walk, cool, silent; I was glad to be alone.

As I'd gone last year and knew a little of what to expect, I got there early to revel in the quiet. Some 20 people were already in the huge building, women on the top level, almost even with the massive, ornate chandelier.

The choir came in far below to put their prayer shawls on, and the cantor, already robed, added his special head-gear. I watched intently, storing each movement for future viewing.

The service, of course, was in Hebrew, which included much excellent singing, all a capella. The cantor's clear tenor voice carried easily to the fourth level. The choir, with a fantastic blending of male voices, had the same little director as last year, having the same trouble keeping his prayer shawl on, his arms constantly moving.

They would also perform for Saturday's four consecutive services and would be 25 hours without food or drink.

I left after two hours, knowing from last year it was over three hours long. Outside in the warm fall night, the courtyard was crowded, and adventurous boys raced their bikes safely down the middle of King George, usually packed with traffic.

Saturday was very quiet for me. Fasting is traditional, but not required, and though it is high on the list of my most unfavorite things to do (like sky-diving or bronc riding), I felt strongly the need to fast for two friends, both Jewish, whom I'd not seen for over five years. So I walked the peaceful streets, a few families out, some couples, a smattering of singles, none of us hurrying.

That night, when the 25 hours of Yom Kippur were over, people would stream out of the city's many synagogues, heading directly for the Wailing Wall in the Old City, groups of men singing and dancing joyously on the way.

Sunday morning, I read they had vandalized the synagogue, saw the front page photograph of spray-painted words on the courtyard wall outside the entrance, the wall that surrounded the gathering place where Friday I'd seen families, children, old people, laughing, talking, standing quietly, on that very special night that has been celebrated by Jews for thousands of years.

Scrawled words said Jews had sinned by what they'd done to Arabs, how the Intifada would win. The Rabbi told the people to leave it for now, they would not interrupt their worship, not on Yom Kippur.

Since then, two border guards were killed stopping an eighteen year-old girl suicide bomber before she got to the crowded bus stop with her explosives. The boys, 18 and 19, saved a lot of lives that day.

Up in Gaza, a hotbed right now, three IDF soldiers were killed when Hamas infiltrated the camp, two of the boys killed in their barracks. That, however, is war. A big difference, as I see it, from sending children to explode themselves to kill civilians. The youngest suicide bomber was 11. Hamas had offered him l00 shekels. The boy caught this week was 15. He had been offered l000 shekels to blow himself up.

I sent that article to my 15-year-old grandson in Tennessee, to give him perspective on what value the Hamas places on lives of children. They believe they are right, of course, and have been taught that since birth. How can you argue or judge when someone believes it's right, and for their god.

Well, enough. Life does go on. I'll head shortly to one of my favorite restaurants on Ben Yehuda a few blocks from here, have a cafe afouh and a fresh muffin, and read at a table in the sunlight. I will take the joy where I can, I will comfort where I can, and I will listen to my Lord Who has not taught me to hate, but to love.

This Erev Yom Kippur was September 24, 2004, my son's 37th birthday.

GROWING UP IN MADISON
RON HEVEY

Using modern technology to search the past

One problem with the *Growing up in Madison* shtick is that I have but 20 years of long-time-ago memories to scour, recount and prep for *Extra Innings* readers. Luckily, about the time I finish what seems like the "last" piece, another idea pops up. So far, so good.

Reading Gabriel Garcia Marquez's wonderful *Living to Tell the Tale* has magnified my concern about having something to write about. The book has been hailed as a "… radiant, powerful and beguiling memoir;" as it describes Nobel laureate Marquez's early life until he begins work first as a journalist and then a struggling writer, good stuff for a wannabe. When Marquez tells of his publisher/coach asking, "What have you got for me today?" I feel a chill; the boss had space to fill. Marquez's job was to fill that space in a few hours. The scene makes me uncomfortable. I think, gee, Marshall counts on contributors not only to fill space every month, but also to do it with what readers would like.

I ask myself, "What have you got for *Extra Innings* today?"

My dearest has presented me with a surprise gift, a new iPad, a seemingly unrelated event. The iPad has speaker input; dictation to print has interested me going back a quarter century. An outspoken New York mayor once asked when my company's computers would let him talk – and talk and talk - into them. "Soon," I fudged. It took years and at first it was expensive. Now we have dictation as standard on affordable tablets. Am I ever ready to give the microphone a try.

Why not dictate ideas for *Extra Innings*? Right now. In less than an hour. Before I know it I'm recounting how I signed up for Write-by-the-Lake a few years ago. I'm back in Madison staying with my sister, Carol Lynne, blocks from where I grew up. The white Capitol dome peeks at me across Lake Monona as I drive toward the University. Rolling Lakeland Avenue with its Indian mounds is one of my favorite early morning spots.

When I reach the intersection where Williamson angles off onto John Nolen Drive, I remember that Dad and I commuted through here many a wintry morning, he to work and me to school during my nine years at Edgewood and the UW. Readying ourselves for a busy day ahead, our conversations were filled with wisdom I still recall. John Nolen Drive, the new Capitol Square bypass in the 50's as cars choked city streets, was created on rock-fill lakeshore next to rails no longer used for people, only freight; Madison's grand train stations had closed to await later resurrections.

Arriving at the campus I park behind Brown's Book Store in a new-to-me multi-story garage and walk over to the Pyle Center. Langdon Street hasn't changed in forty-some years. I'm back in class at the University of Wisconsin. Wow.

We go to work on homework (yikes) Marshall has assigned for the first class. Classmates pore over first scenes of stories. My scene features multiple points of view - how clever; I have created a scene confusing to everyone in class but me. Time for basic training. Embarrassed, I promise myself to never let confusing points of view happen again. It's time to move on, to enjoy the experience and to learn, which I do for the remainder of a fun-filled week. I approve this message as a plug for Write-by-the-Lake.

All these recollections I dictate in minutes. Our wordy plumber stops by to deliver parts, and he would like to discuss their merits longer than I would like to hear them. The short interruption is no problem; with my iPad tucked under my arm, I ready to continue. My cat, Casper, recovering from allergies, bugs me to go outside. I join him and sit the shade of a cool August morning, dictating a stream. I will clean it up later.

I realize that I have broadened my topic as I begin to think of more *Growing Up in Madison* stories. I'm good until at least next Spring.

Excerpt from *Living to Tell the Tale*:

"Tell me something, my young namesake," he [Marquez's publisher, whose name was also Gabriel] asked, "how many installments is the shipwrecked sailor going to have?"

…we still had seven installments. Don Gabriel was horrified.

"No, my young namesake, no," he responded with annoyance. "There have to be at least fifty."

COACH'S BULLPEN BLURB

Albert one of the best sports

Jason Albert's piece for *Slate* on Tony Plush, the alter ego of Milwaukee Brewers outfielder Nyjer Morgan, was shortlisted in *Best American Sports Writing 2012* (a marvelous anthology of fine writing, BTW). "I suppose it makes sense it wouldn't make the full-fleshed book proper," Jason notes. "Tony Plush is imaginary, after all."

Jason also has a terrific piece in *The Morning News* on his experiences working in the Wisconsin Dells, "The Waterpark Capital of the World." He also describes his efforts to publish a book on the subject, in the genre of "stunt memoir." It's a smart, funny piece with plenty of attitude and a lot to say about our culture-- and the lengths we go to to get published.

But, as Jason notes, "It's not like I was planning to spend my summer shuffling through a Paris breadline. I was going to 'The Waterpark Capital of the World!'"

Personally, I'd take the Paris breadline.

The Morning News is an online magazine of essays, art, humor, and culture published weekdays since 1999. Jason's article is at http://www.themorningnews.org/article/down-and-out-in-a-repurposed-troop-carrier.

Excellent memoir can be yours for the unscrambling

Our own Meandering **Madonna Dries Christensen** is offering two free downloads of the e-version of her fine memoir, *In Her Shoes*, to *E.I.* readers. Since I've no doubt many more than two of you will want one, we've decided to make a contest out of it. Unscramble the following fictional character's names and send your answers to me at mcook@dcs.wisc.edu/ If only two get all eight correct, they'll be our winners. If more than two go 8/8, we'll have a drawing to determine the winners..

rsuen dheatrc
llweii rktas
njae dbieor
bnahilan celret
oylhl gylgolhti
neieln lmals
rhautr rdylea
eilce nsojhon

You'll need a Kindle, Nook, or iPad (or a nice friend who will loan you one) to receive your book.

Gadi finishes Geddy's story

Gadi Bossin has finished his novel, *Geddy Mason in Love*, after long, thoughtful, and fruitful labors. I read a previous version and look forward to the new one. We also exchanged granddaughter brags. HIs Lia ("rhymes with onomatopoeia," he notes) recently took the train to the beach with her granddaddy, where they learned lots about surfing, sand castle sculpting, and choosing the best ice cream bar.

Our wonderful language

"Without a doubt Ron Santo is arguably the most underrated player to ever play the game [Major League Baseball Bleacher Report]

Coach makes 500,000th error

I made another mistake in transposing Esther's column last month, for which I apologize to you all and especially to Esther. The passage I mis-formatted should have looked like this:

"Off in the darkness the hourses moved restlessly."

--a typo in Clifford Simak's A Heritage of Stars

We believed they were horses; and so
we saddled up, and rode expectantly
through the long day and into the night.
Then we dismounted; and slept; and still
they continued to carry us
---the hours. They wouldn't stop.
They carried us clean away.

Fantasies and even illusions are important too. As Truman Capote declared:

A man who doesn't dream
Is like a man who doesn't sweat.
He stores up a lot of poison.

And finally...

Thanks to all who responded to last month's reader survey. Watch for another one soon.

1911 Darwin Awards include these winners

Honorable mentions go to:

* The chef at a hotel in Switzerland lost a finger in a meat cutting machine and after a little shopping around, submitted a claim to his insurance company. The company expecting negligence sent out one of its men to have a look for himself. He tried the machine and he also lost a finger. The chef's claim was approved.

*** After stopping for drinks at an illegal bar, a Zimbabwean bus driver found that the 20 mental patients he was supposed to be transporting from Harare to Bulawayo had escaped. Not wanting to admit his incompetence, the driver went to a nearby bus stop and offered everyone waiting there a free ride. He then delivered the passengers to the mental hospital, telling the staff that the patients were very excitable and prone to bizarre fantasies.. The deception wasn't discovered for 3 days.**

* A man walked into a Louisiana Circle-K, put a $20 bill on the counter, and asked for change. When the clerk opened the cash drawer, the man pulled a gun and asked for all the cash in the register, which the clerk promptly provided. The man took the cash from the clerk and fled, leaving the $20 bill on the counter. The total amount of cash he got from the drawer... $15.

*** Seems an Arkansas guy wanted some beer pretty badly. He decided that he'd just throw a cinder block through a liquor store window, grab some booze, and run. So he lifted the cinder block and heaved it over his head at the window. The cinder block bounced back and hit the would-be thief on the head, knocking him unconscious. The liquor store window was made of Plexiglas. The whole event was caught on videotape.**

* As a female shopper exited a New York convenience store, a man grabbed her purse and ran. The clerk called 911 immediately, and the woman was able to give them a detailed description of the snatcher. Within minutes, the police apprehended the snatcher. They put him in the car and drove back to the store. The thief was taken out of the car and told to stand there for a positive ID. To which he replied, "Yes, officer, that's her. That's the lady I stole the purse from."

*** The *Ann Arbor News* crime column reported that a man walked into a Burger King in Ypsilanti , Michigan at 5 a.m., flashed a gun, and demanded cash. The clerk turned him down because he said he couldn't open the cash register without a food order. When the man ordered onion rings, the clerk said they weren't available for breakfast. The man, frustrated, walked away. [*A 5-STAR STUPIDITY AWARD WINNER]**

AND THE WINNER IS...

When his .38 caliber revolver failed to fire at his intended victim during a hold-up in Long Beach , California, would-be robber James Elliot did something that can only inspire wonder. He peered down the barrel and tried the trigger again. This time it worked.

IN THE PROJECTION BOOTH
Jake McLaughlin

Bruce's fin is still as terrifying as ever

If you're a fan of films like I am, the movies of Steven Spielberg have most likely been a part of your life. Maybe you saw the magical *E.T.* as a young child or the adventurous *Raiders of the Lost Ark.* Maybe you saw *Schindler's List* when it was in theaters or when you were studying World War Two in high school.

Likely, though, the first Spielberg film you saw was his first feature, *Jaws,* the film that changed summer movies forever and still has people afraid to go back in the water.

It's one of the most suspenseful films ever. I recently rediscovered it on Blu Ray, and there was a scene or two where I still jumped. The opening scene alone gives this film its legendary status, when Bruce (the name given to the shark by the film's crew) claims his first victim.

The three main characters are likable and interesting: Roy Schneider as Amity police chief Brody, Robert Shaw as grizzled sailor Quint, and Richard Dreyfuss as marine scientist Hooper. Quint is the most interesting. His first appearance in the film establishes him well enough for us to know what type of character he is but still leaves some mystery. His monologue on the boat towards the end of the film is Shaw's best scene.

The suspense is crucial, of course, especially when accompanied by John Williams' iconic score. Anytime those first notes play, I get chills, knowing that Bruce will soon show up to cause chaos.

To this day, I still think Bruce, with those beady black eyes, looks scary. The scenes where he isn't visible, though, are the most terrifying. The site of his dorsal fin alone is all that's needed to get your heart pounding.

The Blu Ray restoration of *Jaws* is one of the best restorations I've seen. Everything looks and sounds as clear as ever. There was one minor moment where Quint's boat sets sail and we see the shark jaw above the window of his shack, and I was amazed at how such a small moment could look so good.

Blu Ray also offers an exclusive new documentary, *The Shark Is Still Working: the Impact and Legacy of Jaws.* It's filled with interviews, behind the scenes footage and much more that is great for fans.

So, whether you've seen *Jaws* many times or would be seeing it for the first time, now's a great time to visit or revisit the film. Still as impacting as it was in 1978, *Jaws* remains one of the best suspense films ever made. If you still haven't seen this masterpiece, I suggest you get to your nearest Best Buy or video rental store and pick it up. You'll be in for quite a ride.

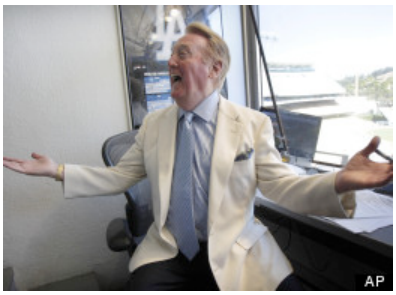
Addendum to last month's column

I know I praised the heck out of *The Dark Knight Rises* and said that there probably wouldn't be anything as spectacular in film for quite some time. That's definitely not true. There are at least three more movies still coming out this year that look fantastic, and there's one that I think will top it for my favorite film of the year. I still really like the movie, but that last part of the review was so unnecessary.

The three upcoming movies I'm anticipating are: *Skyfall, The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey,* and *Django Unchained.*

BULLPEN BRIEF

Why is this man happy?



Vin Scully, 84, has signed a one year contract to announce the play-by-play for the Los Angeles Dodgers. Vin's no rookie. When the Brooklyn Dodgers beat the Yankees in the 1955 World Series, he was already the Dodgers announcer-- and has been ever since.

The five most important elements of your world

by Carol Hornung

"You've got to see this guy. He's really good at talking about writing," said a long-time friend, who spent the weekend with me and 1,600 other people at Geek Kon, Madison's gamer/sci-fi/fantasy/anime convention.

I attended a panel on World Building, featuring the aforementioned writer, Michael A Stackpole. He started his career by cranking out four "Star Wars" spin-off novels known as the Rogue Squadron series. He'd been playing in a world someone else created. What did he know about building worlds, and what did that mean to me, a mystery writer, who writes in the real world?

Turns out - plenty. Stackpole, who has a degree in history, takes on writing with a very logical, structured approach. If you're writing fantasy or science fiction, how do your characters eat? Do they buy food with money? How do they earn it? What's a normal day like for them? And be logical - if you have a race of people known for their horsemanship, chances are good their village isn't located on a mountainous seaside.

Then he offered up an exercise that anyone can use, in any genre:

"What are the five-to-seven most important things about your world that your reader must know in order to understand and enjoy the story?"

1) Figure out those 5-to-7 things. In fantasy, it may be rules of magic, races of people, the lay of the land. For me, in mystery, it's all about setting: urban or rural? Modern or historical? Young characters or older? Do they have cell phones? Internet? Cars? Are the police good guys or bad guys? What are my main character's most important skills?

2) Write ONE sentence, no more than 12 words long, that describes each element. This gives you a description of up to 84 words. No more. Everything important must be in there.

3) Sprinkle those sentences throughout the beginning of your story so your reader gets a clear view of the world he/she is visiting.

Writing original characters and creating a story people care about are, of course, important, but the structure of your setting is vital to the ultimate success of your story. As a mystery writer, I don't need to tell people that there's only one sun and a 24 hour day, but if I write a story set deep in the woods with no modern conveniences and at the climax of it all someone suddenly pulls out a cell phone and calls the police, I'd get a serious smack-down from everyone in my writer's group!

Try the exercise for yourself, no matter what genre you favor. The better you understand the world you've built, the more your reader will enjoy the story you tell.

Carol Hornung is a mystery writer and member of Madison's Tuesday With Story writer's group (2nd & 4th). Check them out at www.TuesdaysWithStory.com.

"In the south there's a difference between 'Naked' and 'Nekkid.' 'Naked' means you don't have any clothes on. 'Nekkid' means you don't have any clothes on ... and you're up to somethin'."

Lewis Grizzard

A Miracle I live to Tell About

A small wound on one arm,
pulsing lights of ambulance
approaching,
Poem I once read in College English
class,
flits through my head,
"pulsing light, pulsing blood"*
But nearly no-injury mishap, this—

Concussion,
drifting in and out of consciousness,
dreamy image of large gray-feathered
wings
but headless bird, overhead,
lifting swiftly, then whooshing
into the ether.

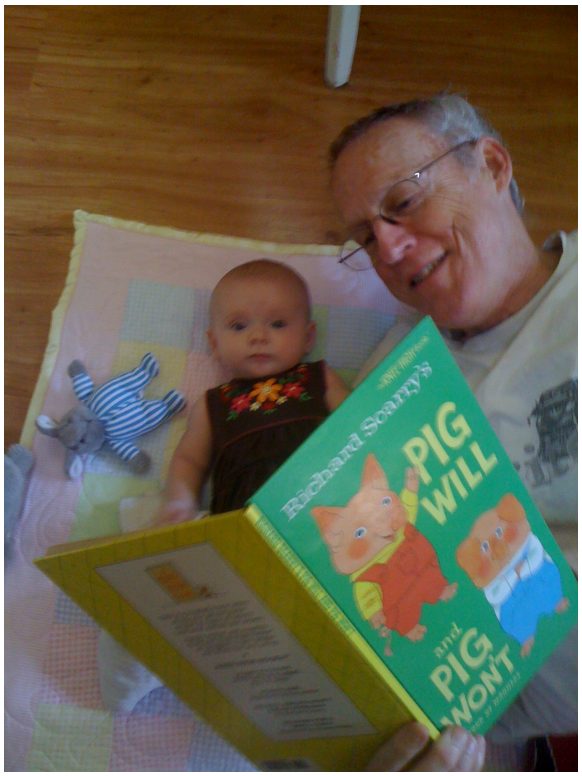
"The miracle lady," they called me
in white-uniformed halls,
with pressure-checks,
thermometer thrusts,
eyes filled with flashlight
and "grab my hands, squeeze as
hard as you can," every two hours.

Giant machine, two-ton plus
huge-tired tractor, rolling over me
but only traces, tire treads across slacks,
tire impressions on one leg, the proof.

A hair-line pelvic fracture manifesting
itself after the fact,
sending me back to the hospital,
nearly a week later.

They call it a miracle
I live to tell about….

--Norma J. Sundberg—

* poem by Karl Shapiro, "Auto Wreck"

And now, at last
YOUR MONTHLY MOMENT WITH LILY