



# *Creative Wisconsin*

October 2015

## Wisconsin's Writing Home



**Meet the 2015 Jade Ring and Florence Lindemann Humor contest winners and placers**

**Back row, standing: Bill Mathis, Ed Sarna, Jim Guhl, Elaine Maly, Jill Follet, Melinda Hagenson, Mary Jane Guhl; Middle Row: Billie Diersen, Brenda Axt, Yvette Flaten, and Irene Hansen; Front, seated, Joel Habush**

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and at Facebook: [www.facebook.com/WIwrite](https://www.facebook.com/WIwrite)**

**Inside this edition: Jade Ring and Humor contest first place pieces**

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## Wisconsin Writers Association

The Wisconsin Writers Association provides a structured fellowship of amateur and professional writers who support and assist fellow writers with all phases, type and categories of creative writing. The Association encourages the preservation of family, local, regional, and state history. The Association offers informational educational services to writers and to the general public. The Association assists writers in editing, publishing, and marketing their work, and provides counsel regarding, and contact with, publishing and literary agencies and representatives.

- Mission Statement

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**Congratulations to all the contestants!**

**WWA Contest Winners—2015**

**Non-fiction**

1. Bill Mathis – The Oak Tree
2. James Guhl – The Artist Within
3. Paul Gurzynski – A Well-Timed Call

**Honorable Mention**

Brenda Axt – River Rat  
Cari Taylor-Carlson – Letting Go

**Fiction**

1. James Guhl – Deep
2. Tammy Bailey – Closing Time
3. G.A. Scheinoha – J Street Blues

**Honorable Mention**

Billie Diersen – Eight Words  
Mary Jane Guhl – Rabbit

**Poetry**

1. Yvette Flaten – Skies by Tiepolo
2. Jill Follett – Control
3. Irene Hansen – Off-spooling

**Honorable Mention**

Bill Mathis – Of Balancing Rocks  
Melinda Hagenson – Easter Week

**Florence Lindemann Humor**

1. Elaine Maly – No Comprendre
2. Joel Habush – Caution, Writer Ahead
3. Ed Sarna – Dwayne Danger, Private Eye

**The Friends of Lorine Niedecker and  
Woodland Pattern Book Center  
announce the publication of the first  
two monographs in the  
*What Region?* series**

The publication kickoff was held at Woodland Pattern Book Center in Milwaukee on May 12, Niedecker's birthdate. The series will feature new articles about Niedecker, exploring her poetics, with occasional republication of scholarship no longer readily obtainable.

The first monograph is entitled  
**Lorine Niedecker's Century, 1903-2003**  
and is a new work written by Jenny Penberthy. Penberthy is Niedecker's preeminent scholar and editor of her Collected Works.

The second volume,  
**Increase Lapham & Lorine Niedecker**,  
is co-authored by Paul G. Hayes & Martha Bergland. This volume shows how subtle Niedecker was at incorporating her reading into a short poem. Hayes and Bergland have discovered the underlying sources of the poems "Asa Gray" and "Poet Percival" in correspondence of Increase Lapham and in his scholarly papers. The authors show the richness of Niedecker's apparently simple poems.

The monographs cost \$10 each and shipping/handling/tax is \$5 for one or both.

Send checks to  
Woodland Pattern Book Center,  
720 E. Locust Street,  
Milwaukee, WI 53212

# The Jade Ring

## NONFICTION

**About the first place piece,** judge Dick Radtke says: "The piece is a finely crafted essay taking the reader into a very frightening series of life-and-death experiences. One of its many strengths is its ability to draw the reader in and participate in the narrative. By offering selective details instead of explaining the course of events, the author invites the reader to join in the journey. The author takes risks that are well rewarded in creating a fine work of non-fiction. The poetic scene breaks bring addition life to the story. And the oak tree is a formidable symbol of the strength, and sometimes vulnerability of life."

## The Oak Tree

Bill Mathis, Beloit

*The pull of that Oak Tree,  
Fall leaves fluttering, trying to hang on,  
A platform nailed high in it,  
Rough wooden rungs starting at the reach of  
a ladder.*

Joe died this morning. It was suicide.

NO! Our group of friends gasped.

Oh my God. How is his wife?

My gut tightened with rumblings of despair. Over the years, three people I knew committed suicide. Joe, an acquaintance I was getting to know, Frank, my father-in-law who I knew well, and George, a sibling of good friends. My gut reminded me of the hopelessness, pain, and suffocating black abyss that once beckoned me. Those feelings embodied by a giant oak tree that

still stands on the edge of a woods, near my former home.

Joe

At the funeral home, photos of Joe enjoying his seven decades of life were displayed. Several, taken recently, triggered memories of meeting him on the sidewalk by the river a week before his death. Bent forward, leaning on two walking sticks, his determination and will to keep his shattered body moving flashed in his trademark grin as he greeted me, then lumbered on. One foot, then the next, he seeming content.

A teenage girl held tightly to her dad's hand, her face taut with pain and fear. She moved into the chapel, saw Joe's urn, then abruptly turned and left, pulling her dad with her. Joe was a therapist who did marvelous work with teens and adults. I felt sorry she missed the wonderful words, the funny stories shared by the Rabbi and Joe's close friends. And our tears and laughter.

Fairly new to town, I regretted how I barely knew him as my heart ached in shared loss with those present. I hurt for his wife, who carried the laundry down the basement steps, only to find him. And her moments, those frantic moments, that proved too late to save him.

She told a friend she knew the "why"...but not the "why now."

*The shimmering Oak Tree kept calling me.  
A ladder to reach the rungs was in the shed,  
A rope hung next to it.*

continued



Frank

A phone call. It's an emergency. Come home NOW. My wife in tears, our children sat crying on the couch, stunned. Frank, her father, our children's grandfather, my father-in-law, was dead. Suicide. Shot himself in the bathtub of his home, nine hundred miles away. His insurance papers, financial accounts, titles and will, all precisely organized in stacks on their neatly-made bed. His compulsive sense of order and control evident even in his death. Yet there was no note.

That afternoon his wife, a mother, grandmother, my mother-in-law, was waiting for him to pick her up at the day care program she attended for Alzheimer clients. He never showed. All day she muttered and paced, her hands twisting and untwisting, "Franky, Franky. Oh Franky." Incapable of sharing anything else with the concerned staff.

Frank's sixty-four-year-old body lay in the casket. Tiny waxed stitches visible in his hair, if searched for. The twenty-two caliber bullet didn't tear a big hole or do much damage...to the top of his head.

In tribute, my high school daughter played *The Wind Beneath My Wings*, while her mother sat on the piano bench beside her. My brother-in-law and I eulogized Frank. Or tried to. Frank was complicated. Family members sat in the front, long tamped-down issues or ghosts from Frank bubbling within. Behind them, neighbors wept for his poor wife. Other pews seated corporate execs who formerly worked with Frank—prior to the discovery of the bottles in his desk.

Recovering alcoholics from his life with AA, thankful for Frank's generous help and leadership, sat next to co-workers and friends from his earlier lives. Each group knew a segment of his life, few knew all the pieces. Mom

sat huddled between her children, lines of confusion and sadness etched her face. "Franky, Franky. Oh, Franky."

What were her secrets, the ghosts she could never release?

What had he told her that fateful day, before he bundled her through the front doors of the dementia daycare? On the morning he did not bring donuts or greet the staff in his usual hearty manner; instead he barely nodded and brusquely left.

After the funeral, young grandchildren lethargically tried to play, food was barely nibbled, little alcohol consumed. Mom tried to follow conversations, but too many circuits couldn't connect. "Franky, Franky. Oh Franky." One of their children lived nearby and would take her in. The rest lived out of state.

"I never thought I would have to clean my father's brains off the bathroom ceiling," a son half-joked, his typical way of dealing with tension and the haunting traces of Frank. Then with a sigh, he quietly added, "Nobody should ever have to clean up a mess like that."

Shortly after the funeral, Frank's physician informed family members, that several days before Frank's death, he bluntly told him to place mom in a full time facility caring for Alzheimer patients.

We thought we knew the "why." I thought we knew the "why now."

*Through the fog swirling in the dark abyss of my mind,*

*A light grew.*

*An answer lighting a path to the shed, the rope, the ladder.*

*The path to that Oak Tree.*

Me

My desk was strewn with papers, financial printouts on green and white striped paper, a

spindle poked high with pink phone messages, everything a blur. Memos stacked neatly in front of me, marked in bold by staff desperately trying to keep the ship afloat. “Please respond” or “Decision needed, *PLEASE!!*” Everyone waiting for me to concentrate, to again take charge. Of everything.

Paralyzed, I, the captain, could only see fog leading to gloom and misery. I was a failure, a workaholic who burnt the candle at both ends, leaving little for my wife or children. I was a born-again Christian who couldn’t read his Bible, no longer excited over church or hymns, or the idea of salvation.

My marriage was in trouble, deep trouble. I didn’t know how to fix it. Nor did prayer seem to help. There were no affairs. But, I still felt pressing guilt, shame, profound fear and total responsibility. I was failing God. The Bible said so. How could I tell my Biblical parents and siblings, my Christian friends, or my wife, that I was failing to live up to God’s expectations of a proper Christian husband and father? What would they think? What would happen if we divorced? I couldn’t see a way to fix it.

The phone rang. I shook my head to clear my confusion and tried to answer in a chipper, business like voice: “This is Bill. How may I help you?”

“Bill, this is Jenny.” A long pause. “George died today.”

George

Shock overwhelmed me. George was a veterinarian who lived downstate with his wife and their kids. I usually saw the whole family several times a year, and the kids every summer at the camp I directed. They were an active, outgoing family. George was loved by his family and the small communities he practiced in. He was forty-five. I was forty-two.

How did a successful, healthy, forty-five year-old man just die? She didn’t say killed in an accident. She said died.

Then her voice tremored, “Bill, it was suicide.”

Stunned, I heard little else. I couldn’t digest the details, I could barely respond.

Me

Dead...Suicide...George... I thought he was successful. Not a failure. Not like me.

I thought I might vomit.

I sat at my desk for hours, staring nowhere as the sun set, my office growing dim. Finally, I got up, locked the door, and in near darkness slowly walked the grassy path to my home. Walked towards our dim yellow porch light, looking only at the ground. In the flickering shadows, I watched my left foot move. Then my right.

Knowing neither the “why” nor the “why now.”

*Only knowing the dim yellow porch light lit a path better for me,*

*Than the light beckoning to the Oak Tree. ♦*

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Bill Mathis resides in Beloit, WI where he writes - mostly nonfiction, compulsively enters fine art photo contests—but never places—walks his dog Baxter and volunteers.



## FICTION

**About the first place piece**, judge Pam Hayry says, “The action holds the reader’s attention from beginning to end. Gregor’s character and purpose are well developed and interesting. Nice connection to the Ness monster. Never do you suspect that there is a monster living in fresh waters. The piece moves fluidly from one event to another. The pacing is smooth and steady, leading to the climax. The author used great imagery in Gregor’s description and in the details of his fishing methods. Gregor’s character and a few events allows the reader to become involved with the action of the story.”

### Deep

James Guhl, Hudson

Gregor tipped his head back and allowed the final drops of Scotch to drip into his throat. He grinned and smacked his lips, then winked in satisfaction at Billy behind the bar. You’re the only one around here who likes that stuff,” said Billy as he filled a pitcher of beer for a group of fishermen who had just come in. “Get you another?”

“I’d like to, lady, but there’s a fish to catch.” Gregor’s Scottish brogue was as thick as his bushy, red beard. His eager eyes were incandescent. His round cheeks the color of ripe cranberries.

Billy gazed out the window at the vast expanse of a frozen lake. The sky was purple. The setting sun was pink like a sliced grapefruit. Then he shook his head and returned in bewilderment to the Scotsman.

I don’t get it, Gregor. They’re killing the walleyes and lake trout off the east shore. Folks are coming back with limits in the middle of the

day. It’s the best fishing we’ve seen in years. Yet, you keep going out at night to that same dead spot in the middle.”

The Scotsman grinned broadly and chuckled. “I like in the middle.”

“Have you caught a single fish out there?”

“Nope.”

“Gregor! To catch fish, you’ve got to go where the fish are. You’re fishing over the deepest hole in the deepest lake in the entire state of Wisconsin. There ain’t nothing but 280 feet of cold, black water down there.”

Gregor smiled a knowing smile and leaned across the bar. “And we’re quite certain of this, are we, lad?”

“Damn right! I’ve lived on this lake my whole life, Gregor. I know.”

“Well, all right, then. And if I was here to catch minnows, I would mind your opinion. Do you think I’m here to catch a ten-pound walleye?”

“Everyone wants a ten pound walleye.”

Gregor looked around then leaned in over the bar. He signaled to Billy with his hand to come closer. Billy took a step forward.

“I’ll tell you a secret, Billy, For what I’m trying to catch, those ten pounders are bait.” Gregor smiled with his eyes and tossed a twenty dollar bill on the bar. “You keep the change, lad.” He turned on his heel and was out the door into the encroaching darkness.

Billy listened to Garth Brooks on the jukebox as he watched Gregor walk along the plowed road on the frozen lake. He held a walking stick in his right hand and moved along at a brisk pace. As darkness shrouded the lake, Billy lost track of himself. Suddenly, the white beam of a flashlight identified Gregor’s presence over the deepest part of Green Lake.

Billy shook his head and went back to wiping glasses. “Idiot.”

\*\*\*

Gregor eventually found his old tracks and trudged along slowly over pressure ridges and newly formed drifts. It was weird walking on the lake after dark, feeling at times more like the Sahara Desert than a lake in the dairy farming capital of America. At last, an aluminum clad ice house with a single tiny window appeared in the flashlight beam. With separate keys, Gregor unlocked all three padlocks on the welded, steel door and stepped inside.

First things first, he found a wooden matchstick, scratched it against the wall and lit a propane lantern that hung from the ceiling. The ice dwelling was twice the size of all the other shacks on Green Lake. He needed the extra room for three reasons. The first had to do with equipment. The second had to do with a small bed. The third had to do with his prey.

As was his habit he surveyed the inside of the shack to make sure everything was as he left it. One entire wall was covered with charts and graphs. The opposing wall held racks of electronic equipment from floor to ceiling. An array of lithium ion batteries occupied the entire bottom shelf. In the top three shelves were a dozen military-looking devices, each housed in olive-drab sheet metal enclosures.

Gregor hit a toggle switch on the wall and listened as a gas-powered generator rumbled softly.

He hit another switch. Orange and green lights flickered. Three illuminated control panels came alive as the dials assumed positions of activity. Connecting the whole mess, a tangle of thick copper wire snaked around the walls and behind the equipment. Out of the nest of wires and boxes, one single, enormous, black cable as thick as a python lay across the plywood floor and then curled downward through a hole and into the depths of Green Lake.

Gregor studied a chart on the wall with yesterday's date and a time of 3:24 AM scrawled across the top. The paper was mostly blank except for the horizontal and vertical gridlines and the numbers along the left side indicating depth. Adjacent to the number 270 a jagged inverted V marked the page, the product of a dot-matrix printer on one of the upper shelves. Very slowly, Gregor traced the black mark with his index finger.

"Hmmm. What do you think, lassie? Will you pay me a visit tonight? I'm ready for you this time."

The Scotsman turned his attention to what appeared to be a bunch of rope tangled around a big shaft suspended overhead. He hit the switch on an electric winch and the shaft turned, unspooling what turned out to be a massive net. After a few seconds, Gregor stopped the winch and turned his attention to a plastic cooler from which he extracted a lake trout carcass two feet in length. A long string of slime drooled off the fish as he held it over the open cooler. He sniffed it, then turned his head away and coughed.

"Lassie, I've got a lovely dish for you. Come to the table now. Don't be shy."

Gregor pushed a stout metal wire through the mouth of the fish until it poled out mid-body. He then twisted the ends of the wire to the rope of the net. Lastly, he took a knife and cut several slits in the side of the fish to release even more scent.

"You'll find it, girl. I know you will. Tonight, at last, we shall meet."

He reached down and pulled on a rope handle attached to the plywood floor. An entire section hinged up and against the wall, exposing a five by eight-foot rectangle of the lake's surface. With a plastic spaghetti strainer, he scooped off the thin skim of ice. Then he went back to the switch and watched as the winch lowered the net



down...down...down...down...into the blackness. It took more than five minutes for the winch cable to finally go slack indicating that the net and bait had reached the lake bottom. Gregor flipped on the green screen of an old, tube-style monitor. It showed only the horizontal flat line of the lake bottom marked at a depth of 287 feet. He opened a metal folding chair and placed it next to the big rectangular hole in the floor and settle in to wait and watch.

For two months he had watched the green screen. Up until yesterday he hadn't seen a thing. Just a few static crackles caught on his acoustic sensors were all he had to keep him going. Today would be different. He knew in his bones that today would be different.

Gregor McClee thought back on his years of research at Loch Ness. Everyone had high hopes for the whiz kid with the doctorate degree in oceanography who had risen to stardom at Woods Hole with his research regarding the rare Coelacanth that was once thought to be extinct. Gregor played up his stardom from day one at Loch Ness with bold predictions of discovery. He explained how the prehistoric sea creatures go there, theorized on their populations and mating habits, even prepared the scientific name for the pending discovery which he so boldly predicted.

His first two years were funded by the University in Glasgow and the Scottish Ministry of Tourism. But, after Gregor produced no creature, not even a photograph or an underwater signal, the money dried up. Once in high demand for television interviews and lectures at universities, Gregor found himself drifting into obscurity, playing up to a few tour bus operators for what little he could earn from tips. Undaunted, he kept going on his own by setting up his equipment in a dilapidated tugboat that he purchased for five hundred pounds. He tried sonobuoys, audio-anchors and underwater

cameras. Nothing worked. Not even a hint of the famous monster.

Gregor knew he was at the end of his rope when the Scottish Tourism Ministry asked him to give up on science altogether. For a hundred pounds a week, they suggested a show in which he would pretend to spot the creature and harpoon a plastic replica for the pleasure of tourists in bleachers along the shore. Gregor actually considered it for a moment before a remnant of pride rekindled in his heart. Without a word, he abandoned everything, put his equipment into storage and disappeared from Scotland. To the world of monster hunting, Gregor became nothing more than a footnote. No longer was he mentioned at the symposiums around the world. His counterparts at Woods Hole lost track of him. Even the Scotland tour bus operators stopped using his name.

All the while, Gregor had gone back to the basics of research. He studied the attributes of deep lakes and fiords around the world. He visited the experts in underwater paleontology for ideas. He tracked the progression of ancient climate change around the globe. At last, the now obscure expert in underwater dinosaurs resurfaced in Wisconsin, of all places, to search for a prehistoric monster in the land of cheese and cranberries. He kept his head low this time, avoiding attention. He had learned his lesson.

*Finally, my day has come.* "The media bastards won't be laughing anymore."

Gregor settled into the folding chair and unscrewed the lid on a thermos of tea. Steam rolled out like a cloud as he poured it into a plastic cup. He put on a set of oversized headphones and touched a few knobs and dials.

"Come along, girl. I'm ready to meet ye."

\*\*\*

For seven hours an agonizing silence filled the ice shack. Nothing at all showed on the sonar

graph, not even a school of minnow. Likewise, the audio sensors from the lake bottom picked up zilch. Not an ice tremor, no passing snowmobile, not even a click of static electricity. Gregor sucked down the last of his tea and blinked hard. He gave his head a vigorous shake in an attempt to ward off sleep. That's when it came.

The sound was faint and high-pitched like the mere squeak of a rusty hinge. It lasted just a second and Gregor wondered if it was real. He glanced at the audio monitor and observed the anomaly as a one-inch-long blip on the screen. The sound had, in fact, come from beneath the surface of Green Lake. He licked his lips and assumed a straight-backed posture of full alert.

"Talk to me, lassie. One more time, girl." Gregor's voice was a quivering whisper.

A minute passed, then two, then five. He barely blinked, so intent was the marine scientist on the audio sensors. A half hour passed without another sound and he began to question the source. Maybe it was a fish. Maybe a gurgle of bubbles from a methane pocket in the lake bottom.

"Are you down there, girl?"

The response came almost immediately in the form of a mournful, reverberating cry like that of a wolf in the darkness. It was, indeed, a howl of sorts, but a full four octaves higher, approaching the upper reaches of the spectrum discernable to the human ear. Gregor clamped his hands tightly on the headphones. Pressing them against his ears. What followed were clicking sounds, like the chatter of castanets.

It's her teeth, surmised Gregor. She's hungry. She smells the bait.

Suddenly, the sonar monitor issued a beeping sound. Gregor's head snapped around toward the green screen where an inverted V-shaped response signal filled the entire screen.

"I'll be damned. She's bigger than I thought."

The cable attached to the net made a twitch. Gregor's eyes grew wide as silver dollars in the dim light of the shack. Then another twitch came and he slowly moved his hand toward the control switch. At that moment, the cable lurched hard and the wooden beam supporting the winch and cable at the ceiling of the shack began to creak and shiver against the pull of something huge at the dark bottom of the lake. Gregor jumped to his feet and flipped the toggle switch to activate the winch. It labored mightily, slowly winding up the cable. Inch by inch, the net was drawn upward, tugging and shaking all the while. Gregor pulled at the cable with his right hand, trying to help it along.

"Come along, my dear."

Gregor glanced up at the digital video camera suspended from the ceiling. His plan was to record the whole thing, an absolute necessity if he was to return to academia and earn back his well-deserved fame. Yes, he would film the whole capture and release. That, combined with the sonar recording, would serve as proof positive that a descendent of underwater dinosaurs did, in face, still exist. He tentatively released his hand from the winch cable and reached up to turn on the camera. The red light came on as the recording began. Gregor faced the camera nervously as he began the narration.

"Hello, everyone, this is Gregor McClee reporting from Green Lake in the state of Wisconsin in the United States of America. You are soon to observe the capture of a creature never seen before by any living human. A creature so unusual that it must best be described as an aquatic dinosaur."

Gregor offered a wry smile to the camera as he returned his attention to the cable, still straining against the winch. The beam in the ceiling creaked loudly and sagged down a full six

inches. Gregor jumped to his feet and pushed back on the beam with all his strength. He shut off the winch.

"As you can see, this is no small animal. She's trying to break me shack in two." Gregor was red-faced and breathing hard. His gritted teeth clashed. His eyes flashed like a warrior's "I will tire her out first. Then we'll bring her up and have a look at her."

Five minutes passed. Then ten. And with each minute the pull on the overhead beam lessened. The monster had decided to swim laterally and the cable gradually assumed an angle of about forty-five degrees to the surface.

"She's decided to come up from the deep water," said Gregor. "I'll turn on the winch again and we'll try to reel her in."

Gregor flipped the switch and the cable easily rolled up on the spool.

"It appears that she has given up." Gregor smiled into the camera.

More and more cable rolled up on the spool as the winch pulled easily. Gregor released his hold on the overhead beam and watched as the cable slowly returned to a vertical position. He frowned and scratched his head. Was he now pulling up nothing more than an empty net? A red tape mark on the cable rose up from the hole.

"That's my mark for the hundred-foot depth," said Gregor to the camera. He put his hand on the cable and felt for any hint of life. "I do hope she's still down there."

Another minute passed and a yellow tape marker rose out of the water.

"That's the fifty-foot depth marker." Gregor grabbed the cable again. "I'm afraid she's gone."

Gregor took a deep breath and looked into the camera. "There's only dead weight on the line."

A minute later, a blue tape mark indicated just ten feet of depth. Gregor shook his head

sadly and shut off the winch, intent on pulling up the last few feet by hand. It came up like a sack of potatoes—lifeless. Then, just as Gregor reached down to pull up what he was certain to be an empty net, an explosion of water filled the shack and the long black head of a dragon surged up from the hole. The neck was as thick as a telephone pole. The head was flat on top and similar in size and shape to an inverted wheelbarrow. Bright pink gills flared open on both sides and yellowish-green eyes flashed wildly as it stood eye to eye with the Scotsman.

Gregor simply froze, eyes wide—arms rigid at his sides. Suddenly all was strangely still. The only movement was the slow drool of green slime from the corners of the creature's mouth. The Scotsman and the creature locked eyes. They were nose to nose, only inches apart.

"My God, you're a beauty," said Gregor in a steady and fearless voice. A thoughtful smile emerged on his face. Slowly and soundlessly, the one he called lassie opened its mouth just wide enough to show two rows of perfectly triangular teeth, each as big as a man's hand. In the moment that followed, the shack shook violently. Then everything went dark.

\*\*\*

The Wisconsin DNR warden stepped off the all-terrain vehicle and knocked on the door of the ice shack on a sunny day in early March. He admired the size of the structure. With him was Billy from the Lakeside Tavern.

"That's got to be the biggest ice shack on the lake," said the warden.

"Yeah. It belonged to a Scotsman. He was a regular customer at my bar. Then one day, he just quit coming in. Must have gone back home."

"Well, if you can track him down, tell him he owes a three-hundred-dollar fine for not removing his ice shack by the end of February."

The warden studied the door and found three open padlocks hanging from three separate hasps. He swung the door open and found a mess. Several electronic boxes had toppled to the floor. The roof beam had cracked completely in half, leaving splinters of wood on the floor. On top of everything was a coating of ice as if someone had intentionally splashed water around the place. There was no sign of Gregor. Even the net, cable and winch were gone.

"What the hell?" said the warden. "Looks like vandals got in here."

"Strange that the door wasn't forced open," Said Billy. "And what's all this equipment? Looks like military surplus."

"Whatever it is, it's junk now."

The warden's eye landed on a large splash of blood on the inside walls of the shack. "Looks like he caught at least one good-sized fish."

Billy's eyebrows lifted abruptly. "I'll be damned. He caught something in the deep water after all."

The two men hooked up the four-wheeler to the shack and pulled it into the field behind Billy's bar.

\*\*\*

Three months passed. Billy had hoped to get a call or message from his Scottish friend but never heard a peep. Finally, on a warm afternoon in June, while cleaning up the yard, he decided to do something about the abandoned shack. He looked inside and considered the electronics boxes, trying to figure out why Gregor was equipped with the stuff. He unfastened the video camera from the ceiling and set it aside. In the end he trashed everything else. An hour later, with the help of a chain saw, the whole lot was a heap in his Dumpster.

Billy walked back into the bar, placed the video camera on the counter and washed his hands. His eyes landed on the bottle of Scotch

that he had stocked specifically for Gregor. Only an inch of amber liquid rested in the bottle. A subtle grin brightened Billy's face.

"No sense letting this gather dust," said Billy. He unscrewed the lid and held it up to eye level. "Well, Gregor, here's to finally catching the big one."

Billy unscrewed the lid and sucked down the last ounce of Scotch. He then connected the video camera to his laptop computer and hit the play button.◆

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Jim Guhl is an engineering manager by profession who writes short stories and memoirs as a hobby. He is a 27-year resident of Hudson, Wisconsin.

## **POETRY**

**About the winning poem,** judge Sarah Busse says, "Sometimes a poem insists that you come back and read it again, read it multiple times, picking up nuances and textures of language and meaning that you might have missed at first. This poem is one of those, and each time I picked it up off the pile, I was rewarded. What first got my attention was the sensual, sensory details of the piece, languorous colors described in a rich, lush language, combined with—and contrasted to—taut and striking line breaks. There is not a wasted word or syllable. Here is a poet who knows what they are doing. But what brought me back to the piece a second time was the ending, all it said and all it (importantly) did not say. The effect of the last lines is haunting, and I wanted to read it over and see, if I could, exactly how it was accomplished: the poet's focus moves skillfully and smoothly from the observed paintings to the observer, the eye and "I" of the poem. And within that movement, we also move in time from the speaker standing before

(below) the observed paintings to the speaker, now, recalling them in memory, and the poem in the last lines traverses the exact distance between the two both in time and experience. The third time I read the poem, I noticed the sound play that rivers through the poem subtly. The rhyme of “canopies” and “panoplies” seven lines separate, the alliteration of “voluptuous skies/moving from mauve to salmon...” the vocabulary of this sensual poem that includes words like “enticement,” “voluptuous,” “dumb-snapped” and “smoldering.” Unusual, chewy and subtly erotic words, placed perfectly through the stanzas. A poem that can bring a reader’s eyes back to it multiple times, even amid so many other poems, has proved its worth. This is a beautiful poem, impressing this reader nearly as much as the original artworks must have impressed the poet.”

Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, 1696-1770, also known as Gianbattista or Giambattista Tiepolo, was an Italian painter and printmaker. He was prolific, and worked not only in Italy, but also in Germany and Spain.



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Yvette Viets Flaten is active in the local arts community. Her poetry has appeared in many journals, including *Avocet*, *Sow’s Ear Poetry*, and *Midwest Poetry Review*.

## Skies By Tiepolo

Yvette Flaten, Eau Claire

Maybe it was because he was  
a foreigner too, cast upon Spain  
by chance, fortune, an enticement  
too good to pass up.

Maybe it was his name; how it  
rolled from the tour guide’s tongue  
onto mine: Ti-e-po-lo. Mixing  
word-sounds like Tippler dancing  
with Stipple, rounded out by a rolling O.

However it came about, Tiepolo  
fell upon me from the ceilings  
of Madrid’s Royal Palace like  
a sheet of wet silk. His skies  
dropped straight down, skies of  
orange and pink, voluptuous skies  
moving from mauve to salmon  
golden skies soaking up a blood  
orangish red, corners muting to  
a smoky blue, a blue almost  
too perfect, fit only for throne  
rooms and autumn.

I stood agape beneath his  
canopies of color, dumb-snapped  
by the silent, smoldering palette  
the artist revealed to me alone,  
it seemed. While the others traipsed

out behind the guide, Germans and Brits  
and movie-camera-toting Americans, I  
lingered silent and alone beneath those  
panoplies of dazzle I never shook,  
the benchmark to which I have pressed,  
in judgement, every sunset sky  
of the rest of my life. ♦



## FLORENCE LINDEMANN HUMOR

### No Comprendo

Elaine Maly, Milwaukee

This little old Latino guy is standing on the corner with a folded piece of yellow tablet paper in his hands. He is looking around at the street signs. Even though I am sure stopping will make me late for my meeting at the neighborhood coffee shop, I ask if I can help.

In English, of course. I don't speak Spanish other than a few niceties like "gracias," and I can ask where the bathroom is by saying "el bano?" with an urgent look on my face.

He responded in Spanish, of course. And from his gestures and inflections, I gather that he is very disappointed that I don't speak Spanish. It's happened before. People mistake my olive skin and dark hair for something else.

He chatters on and I figure out a little of what he was trying to tell me. He is from Peru. His family lives in Michigan. He showed me the piece of paper he was holding. It had some phone numbers on it but I couldn't understand anything else. I take my phone from my purse and offered it to him so that he could call one of the numbers. He shakes his head no.

So we walk together in the direction of the coffee shop. All the while I'm hoping that we run across a Spanish speaker. That doesn't happen so as we pass by my friend Jill's house, I ring the bell. Her husband speaks Spanish. The dog barks his head off but no one answers.

Then I get the brilliant idea that I could call one of my Spanish speaking friends and ask her to translate for me. On the third try, I connect with my friend Marian who lives in California. I explain the situation to her and hand my friend from Peru the phone. I am really hoping that the

assistance he requires won't take too much longer. They exchange a few brief words and he gives the phone back to me.

Maria says, "Elaine, he's been trying to tell you that he doesn't need any help."

My friend from Peru and I shake hands and go our separate ways on this fine sunny day.

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On sabbatical from a career as a nonprofit leader, Elaine Maly writes about her life as a native Milwaukeean. Most recently, her essay "Condom Mom" won her a 2015 cast position for Listen to Your Mother, Milwaukee. Her essays have been featured on WUWM's Lake Effect program. She's an active member of Red Oak Writing Studio and Ex Fabula storytelling. Elaine blogs at "Stories from My Breezeway" ([storiesfrommybreezeway.com](http://storiesfrommybreezeway.com))

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## MEMBER NEWS

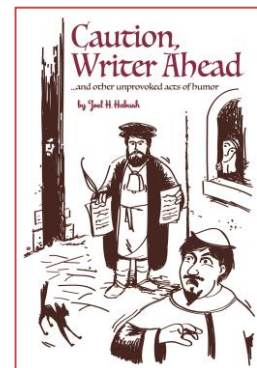
**Nancy Sweetland, Green Bay, says:**

My short story, "At the End of My Rope" was published in the June issue of *Suspense Magazine*. This is a classy, online magazine for mystery readers - lots of stories, and many excellent reviews of new books.

<http://www.suspensemagazine.com>



**Joel Habush, West Allis, says, Lookee here:**



## BOOK BITES

**Jim Landwehr**, Waukesha, shares about his books:  
*Dirty Shirt: A Boundary Waters Memoir*  
and *Written Life*

### ***Dirty Shirt: A Boundary Waters Memoir***

Jim Landwehr and his brothers pursue their love of the outdoors by tackling some of the country's most remote terrain, the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. While encountering crazed loons, widow-making portages, and temperamental automobiles, they also discover more about each other and their long deceased father. In recent years, with a desire to instill their love of the area into their own children, they include them in their voyages, and the legacy continues. Their exploits are woven throughout with humor, emotion, and warmth.

### ***Written Life***

*Written Life* takes a whimsical swing at poetic conventions as it delves into the intricacies of Midwestern life in the twenty-first century. It asks the hard questions, like, God, who are you? Death, when will you come? Dog, have you been let out lately? Introspection and humor, joy and sorrow, murder and pyromania are all fair game in this life; this *Written Life*.

**About the author:** Jim Landwehr's poetry collection, *Written Life*, was released by eLectio Publishing in March of 2015. His first book, *Dirty Shirt: A Boundary Waters Memoir*, was published by eLectio Publishing in 2014. He has non-fiction stories published in *Neutrons/Protons*, *Parody Magazine*, *Boundary Waters Journal*, *Forge Journal* and *MidWest Outdoors Magazine*. His poetry has been featured in *Verse Wisconsin*, *Torrid Literature Journal*, *Wisconsin People and Ideas Magazine*, *Off the Coast Poetry Journal*, and many others. Jim lives and works in Waukesha, Wisconsin with his wife Donna, and their two children, Sarah and Ben. [writerjimlandwehr.com](http://writerjimlandwehr.com)

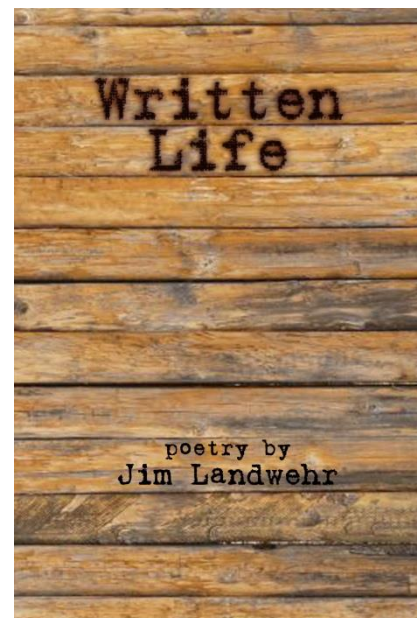
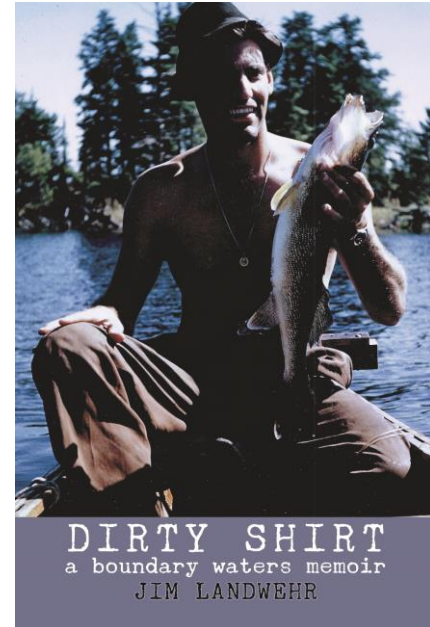
**Both books are available in paperback and eBook at the following websites:**

[www.eLectioPublishing.com](http://www.eLectioPublishing.com)

[www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

<http://www.barnesandnoble.com/>

and also on iTunes



# PROSE

## **A Sculpture on a Piano**

Mary Jacobsen, Webster

A black fiberglass casting of a clay sculpture, the head of a young African girl, rests on our piano. The head was sculpted by our friend, Gentiane Dartigue Edmundson, when we lived in Swaziland in the 1970s.

Purple flowers drifted from a jacaranda tree creating a carpet on which sat a small Swazi girl. I watched in wonderment as Gentiane captured, in clay, the child's character as well as her physical likeness. Occasionally, as she worked, Gentiane would ask my opinion and, timidly, I'd respond, "Perhaps the left cheek..." And she'd slice off a slab of cheek. The whispered rustling of the jacaranda tree served as background music in the warm air while Gentiane sculpted, the Swazi girl posed, and I watched and marveled. The sculpture, after it had been cast, rested on Gentiane's piano and whenever I visited, I'd gaze at that Swazi girl as intently as though I were memorizing her. When I walked in the door on the evening of Gentiane and her husband's Christmas party, I looked toward the piano as usual. No Swazi Girl! "Where is your sculpture?" Gentiane looked embarrassed. "Well, uh, I gave it to a dear friend." I shouldn't have been disappointed. But I was. When we left the party, Gentiane gave me a colorfully wrapped box. I willed myself not to guess what it held. I waited until I got home and then carefully unwrapped it.

Now, when I look at that sculpture of the young Swazi girl's head on my piano, I see the real girl sitting in a purple sea of flowers under a

jacaranda tree. She's trying to suppress the smile that reveals her inner joy. ♦

## **About My Alleged Misdeeds and the Leidenfrost Effect**

Curtis L. Brown, Neenah

Memory is a colorful narrator, but not a reliable witness, surely not for childhood events that happened many decades B.C. (Before Computers). What I recall may not even reflect an original incident but merely a retold variation. However, since wartime ravages deprived me of diary entries, as well as of potential witnesses, I feel justified in correcting the hazy memories of past storytellers, among whom a doting grandma takes the cake for sugar-coated adornments. One preschool recollection conjures up a sandbox in a park with a flight of stairs leading to a synagogue, from which my vocal harmonies had caused me to be removed—tactfully. It interfered with sacred holiday melodies, it was alleged, although all those bearded adults in prayer shawls had been singing just as loudly, and off-key too, in my opinion. No fanfare accompanied my exit from the temple and descent into the park while I followed our maid, Mitzi, who had been hastily summoned as babysitter. But I did not mind, because Mitzi let me build a sand castle with a moat around twin towers.

"It isn't a real moat without water," opined a rival sandbox occupant, who swung a pail and a shovel and showed no respect for my artistic talent. True, my masterful fort provided no shelter against the rain that started to fall, but as drops gathered on the stairs, the water trickled over tree roots into our sandbox and inspired the creative use of mud pies for added spires and fortifications. "Let's go home!" admonished Mitzi. "No! I want to wait until the moat gets filled..." "You'll catch pneumonia! And I'll catch hell from your mom!" "A few more minutes, please!..."

Our debate came to an abrupt end as the pail-swinging monster stomped into my moat and brought down the twin towers. That did it! I tore the shovel from his hand and hit him. In one version of what happened next, my dad was hauled out of the synagogue to face the monster's furious mother, who threatened to sue him, our entire family, and anyone else who thought that hitting with a shovel was appropriate sandbox behavior. According to another version, the lady also demanded that "the guilty party" (meaning us) should pay for the pain and suffering of "the innocent party" (meaning her castle-ruining son).

A third variation prolonged the showdown into a court session, in which my sense of justice considered it mandatory that it was my sandbox opponent who should be punished for starting the brouhaha. While my folks debated how soon I might qualify for law school, they made me wonder what I should have requested as compensation for a demolished sand castle with moat and twin towers plus an hour's worth of architectural expertise.

"That kind of settlement will never happen," opined Mitzi, "until water flowed uphill."

Such an unexpected phenomenon did come to pass, however, a decade later, when I had progressed into middle school. Water still ran

downward normally under the influence of gravity, except when a different flow pattern was demonstrated in our science lab. I had preferred the laboratory to a game of sophomoric tribal ball, at which my non-athletic anatomy was utterly outmatched, and watched as Professor Jauber heated a spoonful of water on a slightly inclined metal plate equipped with a thermometer. Just below the water's boiling point (100°C), steam began to rise and vapor-cushioned droplets scurried over the plate in all directions, including upward.

"This is known as the Leidenfrost Effect," intoned the professor, "named for Johann Gottlob Leidenfrost, a German medic and theologian. He reported it almost two centuries ago, and you yourselves can observe it in the kitchen any time your mom sprinkles water on the frying pan. Its only known practical use thus far is the hydraulic ram, which is not very economical, but better applications may be invented in the future, perhaps by an engineering genius among you." Words alone seldom convinced me, a doubting Thomas, but the ready availability of a gas stove for verification propelled me into our kitchen. The pancake griddle was already warming when I looked for an instrument to measure the Leidenfrost Point.

"Mom, where do we keep the thermometer?"

"Are you sick, Sonny?"

"No, but I need it to duplicate a lab experiment..."

"Hold it! You aren't perchance doing it in our kitchen, are you? I smell something..."

Our rush to turn off the stove was followed by a hurried summary of Johann Gottlieb's phenomenal discovery and an enthusiastic account of the huge benefits mankind might be reaping from my fantastic planned



improvements. However, mom dampened my ingenuity:

“Great, Sonny! Truly admirable! But did you remember that a fever thermometer measures body temperature only? Which, if I remember correctly, is not supposed to exceed 37 or at most 40 degrees Celsius. That’s where the mercury column stops. And you were going to measure water near boiling with it, eh? Do you have any idea what would have happened to the glass tube in the thermometer? You could have been hurt by the explosion, or died of mercury poisoning!”

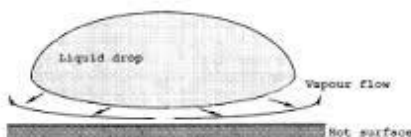
My admission of inadequate reasoning should have been the end of this episode, but was far from it. As my memory reconstructs the most likely sequence, Professor Jauber detained me after our next lab session, congratulating me on a “highly motivated parent concerned about her precious son’s progress” whom he had the pleasure to meet. However, he would appreciate my added effort in convincing her that the Leidenfrost Effect was a purely physical phenomenon and hence insufficient reason for a favorable grade in Chemical Exercises.

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This story won 3rd Place in the 2015 Shirley Lee Writing Contest of Fox Valley Writers.

In case you want to check it out, the Leidenfrost effect is demonstrated at

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=zzKgnNGqxMw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zzKgnNGqxMw)



## Murmurations

Thomas L. Eddy, Green Lake

It had evolved into a movement. Mall walking. Right from the get-go a young female newspaper reporter from Milwaukee, her recently-earned journalism degree framed and perched on the office wall partition, dubbed their moniker—*mallies*.

The mallie numbers swelled inversely to the plummeting, bone-shattering temperatures that the Upper Midwest had endured for the past four years. Cold so bitterly frigid, so unremitting and extreme that climate change alarmists and skeptics alike invoked the polar temperatures as sure evidence for their polar opposite views on global warming and climate change. But no matter *why*, polar vortex notwithstanding, mallies were crowding the climate-controlled shopping precincts in numbers that no one could have foreseen.

And the mallie marvel wasn’t restricted solely to Wisconsin. Throughout the Upper Midwest—from the Dakotas to Iowa, from Minnesota to Michigan, where shortened days capitulated to protracted nights while winter dragged on like an ice age, the mallies converged on shopping arcade after shopping arcade, sporting their Keds and Rockports, Nalgene water bottles, and pedometers tripped to zero.

For mall walkers and mall shoppers alike, there was no collective memory for the original homestead farms that punctuated the vastness, never mind the wild lands that predicated the flood of land-hungry settlers. Short of two centuries, a geological radar blip, natural landscapes transitioned from native grassland and savanna to pioneer farms, these later consolidated into immense unfenced acres of corn and soybean cash crops.



Ensued by urban sprawl, row cropped fields were consumed by residential housing developments, car dealerships and fast-food franchises. Then, in an abbreviated time interval, a stutter step of sorts, shopping malls sprouted overnight in a manner reminiscent of the weeds that erupted from their sidewalk and parking lot cracks and crevices. To mallies, their favorite place and space occupied an indoor trek, a contrived public commons that was open for business.

In shopping mall after shopping mall the walkers paraded as one, a *murmuration* of sorts—like a flock of starlings in flight, each member appearing connected to all the others in a phase transition of feathers, muscle, and bone. The mallies, like starlings, constituted a murmuration—in lockstep with other mall walkers, limbs in cadence, they streamed past storefronts and kiosks like a wheeling starling tsunami—a murmuration.

They arrived by the hundreds from all walks of life—young and old, white and non-white, religious and agnostic, rich and poor, straight and gay. The mallie phenomenon was just that—a bona fide social spectacle.

And what was the objective? Walking, plain and simple. Mall walking mitigated obesity and cabin fever. It provided a comfortable environment to socialize with like-minded mallies while delaying Alzheimer's, expediting a vigorous flow of oxygen to the brain. And mall walking was free. The legions of mall walkers, literally their movement, stirred the indoor air like feathers in flight.

Shopping malls on the periphery of towns and cities were the place where in a span of time decided by the ferocity of wintry blasts, spurred the mallie murmuration headlong on circuitous routes throughout the commercial commons,

complete with artificial micro-climate and piped-in music.

They were easy pickings for the shooters. Such a queer instance of follow-the-leader captured on surveillance video. When the shooting broke out, when the slaughter had begun, not a single mallie broke rank and ran for cover, wholly unlike mall shoppers, the paying customers who jettisoned their parcels and scattered helter-skelter like a covey of quail.

The mallies, on the other hand, shadowed their fellows, their combined movements like one, their bodies collapsing like waves on a Michigan beach, whether they had been struck down by a spray of bullets or not. This maladaptive anomaly was the crux that accounted for the astonishing loss of life, the wholesale blood-letting with no holds barred. A mallie murmuration. Very odd, indeed.

Afterwards, state politicians lost little time jostling for advantage, their partisan cluster and media spin set into motion. Higher up, a Presidential commission was appointed. Congressional and senate hearings collected eye witness accounts of the mall massacres.

Pro- and anti-gun control lobbyists cashed in—so too did certain members of Congress and the Senate. After all was said and done, the spate of five separate mall attacks in four states claimed 211 victims, mowed down like the first cutting of a mature alfalfa field in June.

Fatalities in a Milwaukee suburban mall, in sight of Lake Michigan and bounded by a Pleistocene-sculpted landscape claimed the greatest carnage—67 dead. In each mall attack in every state the only victims were mallies—executed with tactical precision by sporadic bursts from semi-automatic rifle fire, clips bulging, as the walkers pumped arms and promenaded through the death place as one. A murmuration.

The Presidential commission report was inconclusive. The mall gunmen were promptly dispatched by SWAT teams and while it is true that the attacks coincided with Groundhog Day, February 2, there was no evidence of a large-scale conspiracy. Quite the contrary, the massacres were carried out by ordinary men and women who had families, supported the local PTO, attended church, and belonged to Rotary and Lions Club.

That said, all manner of causes for the mall killings were examined—the impact of climate change extremes, social media, reality television, violent video games, the presence of gluten and other food allergens in the food supply, and water contaminated with EDCs—endocrine disrupter chemicals. Even genetically modified food, Frankenfood as it is known, was singled out. You are what you eat, so the argument went.

Another frigid daybreak, the mackerel sky is bruised and splayed with sundogs. Pursued exhalations, a gentle breath stirs the steaming coffee, chipped and stained cup in hand. Hmm. It was forecasted last evening. A thermometer nailed to the trunk of a white paper birch registers minus seventeen degrees Fahrenheit. Then there's the wind, remorseless and unforgiving. Furnace laboring, the vaporous plumes expunged from a neighbor's chimney shudder violently like a tattered flag in a gale. Jesus, it's colder than a Jupiter moon.

Cradling the cup with both hands, I sip the bitter drink and plan my day out at the mall. Easy pickings. ♦

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Thomas L. Eddy hails from Green Lake, Wisconsin where he fishes lake trout and spoils his cat, Junebug. He teaches for Marian University, Ripon College, and University of Wisconsin Colleges.

## POETRY

### Too Black to See Morning

Bev Larsen, Hudson

On a chilly Sunday morning run  
my feet slap the hard road;  
a hair-thin sliver of a moon  
dimly lights the dark sky  
yet too black to announce morning.  
Without warning I sense a vehicle  
following slowly – so ridiculously slow.  
My pace increases as the engine hums,  
an alarming sound that lingers  
beside the woods beside the road.  
Headlights fade to total darkness.  
Too black to see morning still  
the driver can see my every step  
as I jog with unfamiliar strides  
to make it down the hill.  
Lights flood an empty building.  
I dash to the shadows of a dark wall  
and watch, frozen in place. Shivering.  
The road that was freely mine  
only moments ago now traps me.  
The truck does not move. I do not move.  
Lights blink on and off, on and off.  
perhaps a signal?  
He does not move. He does not move.  
Suddenly one beep of a horn  
softly pierces the black morning air.  
A second goes by and another - tap.  
I reach for my phone. ♦

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Bev Larsen just retired from teaching English and Speech at the University of WI, River Falls. Now she has more time to write poetry, enjoy her Arabian horses, and volunteer at the homeless shelter in New Richmond, WI. Bev and her husband live on a small farm north of Hudson, WI.



## **THE MASTER PLAN**

Michael E. Belongie, Beaver Dam

Riding in truck, jostled by uneven prairie land, mowed in six-foot swaths, pathways from which walkers do not see singularity of plants. Driver and conservator, his eyes dart to spot invasive weeds, attuned to differences in Canadian and old field thistle. Regenerated organism, prairie is astir, the swallows swoop at truck's approach to harvest the bounty of mosquito and insects. Acres upon acres, August splurge of ripening harvest and bouquet: tall bluestem, rattle snake master, cup flower, wild carrot. Leaden by morning drizzle, the chicory, yellow cone flower, tall Indian plantain, New England aster and stiff goldenrod bend. This mixed palette of primary and pastel, orchestrated by chirp and buzz wash over the senses in this symphony. This prairie, heavy with the humidity and headiness of ripening seed, rejuvenated to procreate again the master plan of earth.

## **Controlled Burn**

Michael E. Belongie, Beaver Dam

Acres of native American grass are readied; provisions made for trees at boundaries, skirts of grasses cleared from trunks and canopy. Wind direction and velocity determined, the perimeter is ignited with match, and then kerosene nozzle drips the line of burn.

The orange line at first creeps and then, fanned by wind crackles, next snaps as it lofts. Wafting heat startles exposed skin as the blackened membrane undulates the mat of scorched, arching fibers.

A hawk circles again in the south sky as mice and vole dart from encroaching heat and then its talons. This conflagration, an offering, an incense to expiate for so much beyond our pale.

## **Prairie Conservancy**

Michael E. Belongie, Beaver Dam

As volunteer the Reed's canary grass is identified; its dusty ripening maroon head becomes the order of the morning. The heads are snipped off-its prolificacy to be contained.

Norwegian settlers transported the hardy grass, unaware that American prairie balance, subtle and fragile, would not counter this interloper.

Following this pruning, the grounds keeper twists the grasses in clumps and turns the sheaves not for harvest but herbicide spray.

The yellowed stalks of canary grass provide organic fabric of prairie an opportunity to rebound.

## Weave

Pat Janke, Wauwatosa

When a memory picks you up  
carries you off like dandelion fluff  
To a gentle place and time  
Planting old seeds in your mind  
Your senses tingling alive  
Bask in the aura of midnight  
Experience all in your sight  
Feel the goosebumps on your skin  
Relive the moments once again  
Capture scents as you breathe  
For a time tales will weave  
Heartbeat pounds time to leave  
Navigate tangles, webs of light  
Returning to your present life

## Crystals

Pat Janke, Wauwatosa

Time sparkling in seconds  
Dreaming in precious hues  
Tinkling vibrations  
Neurons bursting clues  
Feel joy to your fingertips  
Capture smiles with your eyes  
Save laughter in your heart  
Remember each and every sigh  
Fill memory with holiday scents  
Nostrils with pine purism  
Sing out traditional hymns  
Shaking gently glassy prisms  
Never take for granted  
Hours spent with love  
Fleeting moments rush by  
Sent from heaven above

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Pat Janke started writing classes after retiring from court reporting. A spark for writing was ignited her junior year of high school. She has been published in *Fifty Plus* magazine, *Echo's Journal*, *Screamin Mama's Magazine*, *Famous Poets of the Heartland*, *Goose River*. She received third place for article on Senior Cats in Waukesha Writers Contest.

## REENTRY

GA Scheinoha, Eden

The constellations weren't  
much consolation tonite,  
when you tumbled  
out of orbit,  
like sputnik back  
to Earth again,  
crashed into a Midwestern  
maritime city street,  
finally settled  
for a brass  
ring; remembrance  
of all that splatitute—  
touched down here  
in our midst.

## BAD YEAR

GA Scheinoha, Eden

If, as Robert Louis Stevenson  
claimed, wine is poetry  
in a bottle, exactly  
what is her vintage?  
She pours from  
a long necked  
seldom stoppered  
hour glass vessel;  
a seductive splash  
that preys  
upon unsuspecting  
senses, plays  
them into later, less than  
euphoric recall.  
No blissful ignorance  
here, just words  
which tease, taunt,  
then bit the ear  
with visible,  
visible  
regret.

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GA Scheinoha is a new WWA member whose poetical canon is vast.



## Tribute

### **A Man of Many Passions**

Nancy Patterson, Crivitz

He loved nature, writing, fishing,  
Photography, Hemmingway, Ansel Adams  
Even Glen Miller, Prince, and Jimmy Buffet

He loved to feed the birds, but our squirrels were  
also fat  
By winter's end.  
Although he complained, I know he loved that  
too.

He loved the traditions and rituals of hunting,  
but his  
Desire to take a living thing had long since left.

And of all those things he was,  
He also loved me.

A city girl who yearned for the answers found in  
nature,  
Still, a hard sell in tick existence and removal,  
Baiting a hook with a real worm,  
Not my favorite job.

He taught me to respect and love nature,  
To learn from it,  
Take solace in it,  
To appreciate its predictability and  
Delight in its surprises.

We shared adventures, laughter, and pain.  
He cheered me, pushed me on, cared for me.  
I gladly returned all sentiments with everything I  
had.

We made the best of things, he and I.  
A time I shall never forget.

He is no longer bound by the limits of his  
wheelchair.

His gnarled hands are in no more pain.

His life has taken a different form, a perfect  
spirit, a perfect love.

I will remember his words and experience, and  
Our life and love together,

To guide my path alone.

Looking forward to the day when he will tell new  
stories and adventures  
That will fill and mend my broken heart.

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Bob LaHew, who passed away March 25, 2015,  
was a member of the Board of Directors





## Spending a Week at Novel-In-Progress Bookcamp

Chris Eirschele



Even before the New Year arrived, I found an invitation in my e-mail to apply for the 2015 Novel-In-Progress Bookcamp. I accept any excuse to go back to my native Wisconsin, but still, I wondered if my foundering manuscript could be resuscitated during the six-day workshop.

Nestled in the rolling hills of West Bend farmland at Cedar Valley, the bookcamp provided a balance of intense schedule of classes, critiques, and free writing time with an environment of comfortable living indoors and soothing green space outside.

Bookcamp director, Dave Rank; curriculum coordinator, Philip Martin; author-in-residence, SJ Rozan; and instructor, Lisa Lickel, were on hand to welcome the ten writers. Together, we represented a range of genres from literary fiction, romance, children's chapter books, a cozy paranormal mystery, wilderness adventure, to even an aerial combat story.

The morning classes covered essential novel-writing techniques, the afternoon critique groups were evenly divided into two groups, and

the one-on-one sessions were spread out later in the week and held informally amidst comfy seating, which was in no short supply on all three floors. As the days wore on, writers took to their rooms or found solitude with nature to rewrite, rewrite, and rewrite some more.

On Thursday, we huddled around a literary agent, editor-in-chief, and marketing agent while they called out our queries from the slush pile. I barely looked at fellow writers around the room as my fellow writers huddled: feet tapping, anticipating the call for each of our names. The experience was worth the gut-numbing feedback all writers seek, but usually feel pain in accepting.

The Novel-In-Progress Bookcamp was all I had hoped for. In the end, we stretched out our last day listening to each other's stories and sharing laughs as long as possible. We said our good byes with hugs while we congregated around the pile of suitcases we had stowed in the lobby. We turned away replenished with enthusiasm to finish our manuscripts and looking forward to returning to the Novel-In-Progress Bookcamp next year.

The Novel-In-Progress Bookcamp was sponsored by the Wisconsin Writers Association and the Chicago Writers Association.

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Chris Eirschele is a freelance garden writer published in a variety of print and electronic magazines. Her latest book is *The Kid-Gardener's Planting Book for Parents* and her blog is [staygardening.com](http://staygardening.com). The working title of Chris' cozy paranormal mystery is *Solving Abbie's Murder in the Greenhouse*.

## CRAFT

### The Book Cover Mystery

Nicolette Pierce, Jackson

Don't judge a book by its cover. You heard it, right? While I try not to, I do ninety percent of the time. And it's a subject thing, isn't it? What one person finds attractive could be hideous to someone else. We all have preferences and opinions. How can one cover please everyone? It can't. But that's not the mystery.

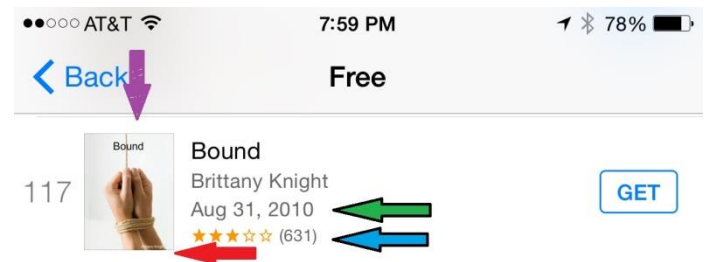
I stumbled upon a book. Just your average mystery book, I thought. Until I discovered the entire publication was a mystery within itself. The more I explored this book, the more befuddled I became. It shook me. You could have knocked me over with a well-aimed jellybean. It led me to question not only covers, but if book blurbs even matter? And, do ratings count for nothing? So, let me tell you about this little book. By the time we're done, you might be flinching at jellybeans too.

It was an average day, an iced tea in one hand and my iPad in the other. I sometimes check the top charts, particularly iTunes since that's my media preference. One of my books ([Deadly Dancing](#). You should download it. It's free!) has been hovering in the Free Mystery/Thriller top chart for about six months now. I've watched as other books spike and fall. And yet, I linger at the bottom. Something I'm very thankful for. Now, you might be thinking, "This is a top chart for free books. It doesn't mean anything." Oh, but it does and there is a reason I'm heading down this winding path. I'm not just here to toot my own horn.

The free charts are cluttered with new and old authors, even famous are starting to list free titles. Some authors pour big money to get into

the ranks only to be gunned down by the next release fueled by thicker pockets. This particular mystery book has been hovering with me. Sometimes it shoots past me and sometimes it falls a bit behind. But we are still together, orbiting around one another. So, what is this author doing different to stay on the list? (Because I sure the heck don't know what I've been doing.) So, I clicked on the book and found myself with more questions than answers.

And here it is: *Bound* by Brittany Knight. Please review what I will call "Exhibit A."



This is a snap shot of the iTunes listing. It's an eye catching book cover, right? Simple and effective. And the more I look at it, the more I think the author made it herself. Why? The title font is too simple. Looks like Arial or something similar. And, the author's name is tiny and blends in with the picture. Not something your average designer would do. But it works! I have no doubt this book has been downloaded purely by the cover. It makes me want to know more. Who is this person with their hands bound? Will they survive?

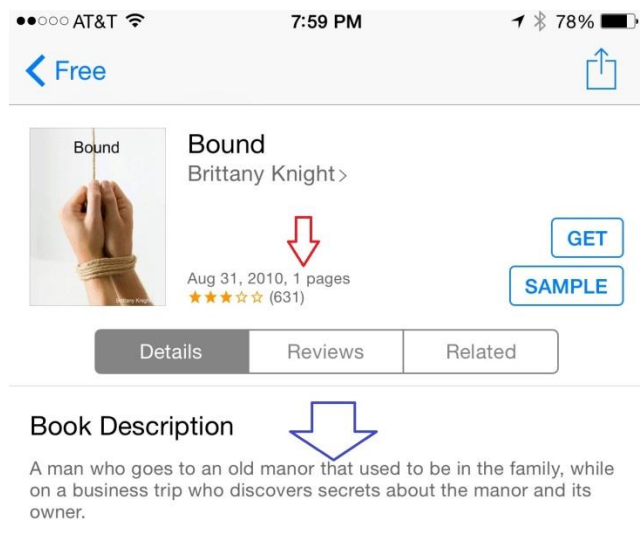
Then, I notice the rating. Three stars. Not bad but we authors sometimes can be star hogs. We crave five stars and will tolerate four. But three is solid and good. I graciously accept three stars. And this author has 631 ratings. For comparison, I've been hovering with her and have 103. She's beating the tar out of me. The date tells me this book has been around for nearly five years. Wow, this must be a great

book, right? Not only is it in the top charts, has a gripping cover and a decent rating, but it's been hanging around and people are still reading it. Mystery solved, right?

Wait! Oh, dear. Wait.

This is where I introduce "Exhibit B." Now is the time to guard yourself from jellybeans or other flying objects, dust included.

It's only ONE page!



Now, a one page book can still be great. But, it still made me stop and wonder. And did you read the book description? "A man who goes to an old manor that used to be in the family, while on a business trip who discovers secrets about the manor and its owner." Okay, I'm not an editing or marketing genius, but I cringed when I read this blurb. Now, I'm not trying to slam this book. I'm trying to understand its success and Exhibit B wasn't helping. So, off to the reviews I trot.

And here comes . . . you guessed it. Exhibit C. Oh, my.

Judging by the reviews, those who downloaded were as confused as I was. But what tossed me for a whirling loopity-loop is the bottom review.



#### 11. Bound

★★★★★ Irritated012 - Jan 30, 2011

Omg like I was pissed when I started reading the book and right when I thought to my self this is going to be good, I'm done with the book it's shorter than a cat in the hat book lol

#### 12. So sad

★★★★★ Sh331a - Feb 23, 2011

Was going to read then popped a page saying preview notice this was 8 pages not worth my time

#### 13. 8pages?

★★★★★ AllieSho :) - Feb 27, 2011

I thought I was the only one. 8 pages? Come on! Disappointed.

#### 14. My book

★★★★★ Brit knight - Mar 1, 2011

You guys, I wasn't even done writing. It was a draft and It's only on here because I was seeing how the whole publishing thing worked. For those who liked it thus far, I will fix it up an make it longer.. For those who didn't like it, well I appreciate your criticism.

Is this right? Did Brittany Knight review her own book and then only give herself one star? Then she defends the book, saying it was a draft and she was seeing how "the whole publishing thing worked." I scratched my head. Judging by the review date, that was over four years ago. Wouldn't the author take down the book if it was only a draft? Surely she'd want the world to judge her by her finished work, not a draft. Is it a hoax? Maybe there's a marketing group or class tracking how many saps will download the work, ignoring the blurb and reviews, and to only focus on the cover.

So, for the sake of this article and the mystery, I do it. I download the one page book. I would offer an Exhibit D, but I don't want to

tread on copyright laws (even though this book didn't bother with a copyright statement). What I notice right away is that it states "Bound [Preview]," and that it's only four pages on my reading device. Okay, so it might just be a draft after all and she's giving me warning, though I still question why she hasn't taken it down yet. And then I begin reading. Without being overly critical, it's definitely written by a novice still working out the kinks. There are some nuggets like, "The rain slowly began to stop so suddenly, which I found strange." Or, "Meluna Ludwell was my great-great-Grandmother's mother who passed away in the 1700s, who left this manor to my great-great grandmother, who didn't want it." There is no ending. We are left stranded.

But, hey, I'm still growing and learning. We are all novices in the beginning. Maybe Brittany has finished the book. Maybe there's a better version out there and people are downloading the wrong version, causing the book to hover in the top charts. It's possible, right?

Without being a total cyber-stalker, I explore the internet, trying my hardest to solve this mystery. Alas, I can't find a website or fan page. No additional books were published under that name. I now face a sobering reality: I'm competing with an abandoned book. My theory: A young Brittany most likely uploaded a draft, eager to dip her feet into the publishing world and then fled from stinging reviews. I hope she wasn't veered off course by them. They are a jagged pill to swallow. Whether or not she knows it, she has done something remarkable. While most of us are clawing to get to the charts, her forgotten book still lives and breathes and is hanging on by its cover. She struck gold with that simple design and walked away before the payout.

A little piece of me withered.

There never was a mystery, was there? We all know you can't judge a book by its cover and we also know that great covers drive book sales. The proof is here in an abandoned book. ♦

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Nicolette Pierce is a prolific romantic suspense author of several series. Nicolette also served as WWA Contest Registrar.

## CONFERENCE REPORT

Lisa Lickel, Kewaskum

(Photos, courtesy of Bill Mathis, next page)

Briefly, on behalf of the conferencees, I believe I can say that a good time was had by all. The several panels and workshops were very well attended, and included some returning and some new guest speakers. Michael Perry, Wisconsin's own best-selling humor and folk author, was on a special panel on Saturday morning with other guest humorists, and gave the keynote talk after dinner at the Jade Ring Banquet, focusing on finding ways and places to write, no matter where you are and what you write. During the day on Saturday, workshops and panels covered everything was editing to character, to writing for the children's audience, poetry, fantasy writing, motivation, and more, with plenty of opportunity to meet with the guests. We had a very crowded author showcase, and a chance to win any of several lovely gift baskets. A special guest included the young lady who was a cover model for the painting on our anthology, *A Wisconsin Harvest, Vol. II*.

Next fall, WWA plans to hold the annual conference in the Fox Valley. Please stay tuned to the website for more information.

<http://www.wiwrite.org>





Rodney Schroeter says: I was talking with Michael Perry at my book table at the WWA Fall Conference. Now, you know that to interrupt such a conversation would require something truly momentous. But interrupt it I did, when I heard and saw who had just stopped at the table.

On that table, I had *A Wisconsin Harvest Vol. II*, the 2013 WWA publication, on display. Also on display were fine art prints of the book's cover art.

I'd never met her before. But when Lily Winslow excitedly told her grandfather, "That's the book I posed for!", I knew who it was.

I'd commissioned my friend, Oshkosh artist Jon Wos, to paint the wrap-around cover for the WWA Press' first (and possibly last) major anthology. Jon used a mutual friend, Steve, as model for the farmer on the book's front cover (an image he used for many months as his Facebook "photo"). A mother and daughter were needed for the back cover, and the model Jon was able to use for the daughter was Lily Winslow, Steve's niece.

Upper left, Rodney Schroteter and the cover artist's model, upper right (see box at left), Nicolette and Bill Mathis, above, Jane Osypowski at the Jade Ring banquet, center, Jim Guhl reading from *Deep*, left center, Michael Perry at the panel "You Write Funny."