

# Extra

## Innings #110

"The writer's home companion"

(25 packed pages, all choice)

### Magic Show

Peter Gilmour

On Sunday mornings my father read the funnies to me; after a while, he insisted I read the comic strips to him. I was learning to read without knowing it.

**I was more infatuated with Dick Tracy than with the magic of reading. I admired his squared-off chin and dreamed about a day when I might have my own two-way wrist radio like his.**

Dad had been hypnotized by Blackstone the magician. Well, not really. Better to say mesmerized. He saw Blackstone perform in person in the Garrick Theatre in downtown Chicago. He and some other kids were called up on stage to put their hands around the bird cage Blackstone held. The birdcage and live bird inside then disappeared from their hands.

One Sunday night I saw Blackstone on the round screen of the black and white television my parents had purchased a few years after the Second World War ended. He performed the disappearing bird in a cage trick on the Ed Sullivan show. No wonder my dad never stopped talking about him.

**"Blackstone was a far better magician than Houdini," my dad insisted time and time again. "Houdini called himself, 'the greatest magician the world has ever known.' Not true. It's Blackstone."**

One weekday afternoon my dad came home early from work so he could take me to the library, a little over a mile from our house. He had talked about the day I would get a library card, and I was looking forward to it.

*"No one is a poet from eight to 12 and from two to six. Whoever is a poet is one always and continually assaulted by poetry."*

— Jorge Luis Borges



**The library, housed in an old limestone mansion, smelled like the highly waxed terrazzo hallways of St. Cajetan's grammar school I attended.**

The head librarian scared me. More than serious, she bordered on severity, like some of the older nuns at school.

Stiff as stale peanut brittle, she handed me an application form to fill out. A sharpened yellow no. 2 pencil stuck through her gray hair pulled back into a tightly constructed rat's nest on the back of her head. Her neck-high white blouse, pressed and pleated, matched her porcelain white skin. The gray suit she wore fitted like fresh upholstery on a wing-back chair.

After I completed the application and handed it to her, she pulled the yellow pencil out of her hair and scrutinized my work line by line, like my grammar school nuns checking homework.

"This card entitles you to withdraw books from the children's section. After you finish sixth grade you then can apply for an intermediate card, and once you graduate from high school, you are eligible for an adult card."

She raised her hand, gnarled index finger erect and wagging, and told me, "You cannot take books out of the other sections of the library without special permission from a librarian."

——"Magic Show" continues, next page

From the severity of her facial expression, I knew permission was rarely, if ever, granted.

Before we left, my dad took me over to the card catalog and explained in a hushed voice how to look up books by title, by author or by subject. He opened one of the innumerable drawers and showed me various types of entries. The thick cards were held in place by a rod running through a hole at the bottom center of each card.

**“Can we see if they have any books on magic?” I asked. He went to the drawer marked, “MAC-MOR,” opened it, and found subject cards under “magic.” They all had an “I” over the book number. They were all in the intermediate section of the library, not the children’s section.**

If Blackstone could make a bird in a birdcage disappear, maybe I could figure out a way to get around the admonition of the librarian who moments before laid down the law consigning me to the children’s section. There had to be some trick I could employ.

I started going to the library after school most days to read the magic books. Since I could not check them out, I sat in the room where the intermediate level books were shelved.

As I sat there reading through the books on magic, sometimes the ancient librarian would creak by and ask, “What are you doing in this room? The children’s room is across the hall.” Another librarian magically appeared one day. Her hair flowed aimlessly down both sides of her tanned face. Her radiant smile, quite unlike the near scowl of the head librarian, reminded me of home rather than school. She wore colorful, loose fitting clothes. She never questioned why I was sitting in the room with the intermediate books.

**Her name badge read, “Miss L. McCourty.” Miss McCourty not only permitted me to check out magic books from the intermediate section of the library but also told me about her plan to have the library sponsor magic shows.**

“I think it would be a good way for other kids to come to the library, learn about what books have to offer. Would you be interested in performing for us?” she asked. I had nearly perfected the pulling things out of an empty wastepaper basket, and was at work on other magic I had learned from the library books.

“Sure, that sounds like fun.”

**I searched the magic books for the most impressive tricks I could perform. I practiced them time and time again. One day I asked her, “How are the plans for the magic show coming along?” She told me, “That’s taking more time than I originally thought, but I’m still working on it.”**

A few weeks later she disappeared just like Blackstone’s bird in a cage. It had been several days since I had seen her, and I wanted to check out a newly arrived magic book I had found on the shelf. Only the head librarian was at the checkout desk, so I had no choice but to ask her for permission to check it out.

“This is an intermediate book, you have a children’s card. You are not allowed to check out this book.”

“Miss McCourty always gave me permission,” I told her.

“Miss McCourty no longer works here,” the librarian informed me, wagging her hickory stick finger at me. She put the new magic book on a cart behind the counter. I stood there stunned. No more magic books to take home with me. I knew immediately there would be no magic show at the library that Miss McCourty had been planning. I knew no magic to meet this tragic turn of events.

## Words at play

*Sent to us by Mary Callahan*

C, E-flat, and G walk into a bar. The bartender says, "Sorry, we don't serve minors."

A linguistics professor claimed a double positive could never make a negative. A student responded, "Yeah, right."

You can't explain puns to a kleptomaniac. They take things, literally.

A Roman walks into a bar and holds up two fingers and says, "I'll have five drinks."

## Madonna Dries Christensen

### Storytellers on the page—but on the stage?

Actors are said to be shy in everyday life and that they overcome this by stepping into a role and speaking through a character. Similarly, writers who paint memorable images on paper are not necessarily articulate speakers. **Rick Bragg**, a Southern memoirist, earned a Pulitzer for feature articles in the *New York Times*. Yet in a video interview about *The Best Cook in the World*, he couldn't put together a complete sentence. The two hosts were visibly perplexed by his bumbling responses to their scripted questions.

**Harper Lee's** reply to requested interviews was "No" or "Hell, no." If she did agree to speak at an event in her honor, her speech consisted of "Thank you," or "Thank you very much."

One person contacted Lee's agent about an interview with the writer. The agent replied, "You'd have a better chance with God." When asked if she was anything like Scout Finch (*To Kill A Mockingbird*) Lee replied that she was more Boo Radley, clarifying that she was not a recluse but simply protective of her inner life. Her handful of close friends say she was an affable and skilled storyteller.

**Stephen King doesn't do book signings when he winters in Sarasota, Florida, but the manager of Barnes and Noble smuggles him in the back door, and he signs books for the shelf.**

He has favorite haunts, so there are occasional sightings. I admit I'd like a glimpse of the horror genre king. He has appeared at Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, where the pricy 1700 seats are filled.

Conversely, octogenarian **James Lee Burke**, who still produces a yearly novel, delights in having an audience. At his livestream readings through a bookstore in Montana, his fans don't mind if he digresses and giggles and rambles. He eventually gets to the point.



— **James Lee Burke**

As journalist Marja Mills said about Chicago's former Mayor Daley, "He didn't necessarily exit the same sentence he entered."

Check Burke's Facebook page for videos about writing, family history, and

life on the ranch. He's a storyteller on the page and on the stage.

**Pat Conroy** left a notable body of work, mostly autobiographical fiction. Still, readers can get a better sense of who he was by reading *Our Prince of Scribes: Writers Remember Pat Conroy*. It's a gem. A charming and charismatic crowd-pleaser, he spent hours at book signings, chatting with each person. Author Terry Kay said, "He had a natural onstage presence so huge it over-whelmed audiences." Another writer friend said, "Listening to him talk ... was a sacred experience, like listening to fine church music."

**I'm uncomfortable speaking in public or being interviewed in person or by phone. E-mail is my choice, whether I'm the interviewer or on the other end.**

I asked colleagues on a Facebook group how they feel about being interviewed or speaking publicly.

Linda Crotta Brennan: "Definitely more comfortable with e-mail. I can revise."

Claire Mauro: "The difference between sitting at a keyboard lost in thought and having a ready answer to any question at random? A chasm. No time to build a bridge. Flight takes practice."

Marie Tobin: "I get tongue-tied or babble inanely if I have to answer a question on the spot."

Dale Carnegie perhaps summed it up best: There are three kinds of speeches; the one you practiced, the one you gave, and the one you wish you'd given.

## The texture of air

### Barbara Burris

The thick, fragrant air of summer turned softer, more delicate. It happened overnight. Fall had arrived. One morning I went outside to feed my birds and the seasons had turned.

**It wasn't a special date on a calendar. There was no frost, no major temperature decline. It was a subtle change in the texture of the air. It felt like my favorite cashmere sweater or the cozy fleece blanket that's something like sleeping with lambs but smells much, much better and doesn't kick.**

I find it strange that the time of year that transitions us into winter, the time when everything begins to die and rot, should have a texture akin to the smoothness of lightweight velvet. What's more, it's my favorite time of year. That's hard to explain to some people.

Oh, yes! I absolutely love the season when everything left in the garden rots on the vine and turns itself back into soil!

Not everyone gets that.

By contrast, I've never looked forward to winter. Winter air launches an attack on my body the moment it rolls in. I suit up to protect myself as soon as the temperatures drop to freezing, but unlike the air from any other season, winter air penetrates any kind of protective gear. Winter air gives me a sharp physical punch whenever I walk outside my house. I feel a searing pain in my lungs on my first inhalation. Its sharp edges cut like millions of tiny razors, leaving my skin stinging as if it had been lacerated. Facing into the wind causes my eyes to tear and burn so badly I can't keep them open. That burning feeling becomes a numbness that moves through my body until suddenly there's nothing. All feeling has left my face, my fingers, my toes. The numbness moves up my limbs like death.

On the up side—there is always an upside if you look hard enough to find it—winter air has little fragrance and never makes me sneeze. It's something like clean sheets that have been hung outside to dry on a rope line strung between two strong trees. It's light and crisp but devoid of all identifiable organic odors... until we get the January thaw.

### The January thaw is a real tease

It brings the first wonderfully sunny days after a long span of gray ones. By then, I've acclimated to that frigid, nearly fragrance-free air, so the sudden rise of mercury to just above the freezing mark where icicles begin to drip off the edges of the roof, makes sitting on the south facing stairs of my front porch on a sunny afternoon feel nearly as good as a vacation in the desert. I said *nearly*. I'm still wearing a parka and boots, after all. It's the first time in weeks I can sit down on anything outside and not feel as though I'm risking becoming one with it. I can take off my gloves and still have feeling in my hands 10 minutes later! But real winter is vicious. Winter air can be deadly.

**When spring air arrives, its multiple layers are a delight, a contagious cacophony of activity. Spring air maintains a hint of winter's crisp edge, but it's a complex recipe that adds a tad of leftover leaf rot to the rich, heady smell of wakening soil and ice melt streams.**

So much happens at once. Germination is taking place. Soils are alive and ready to prove it. They've begun feeding their dormant seeds, bulbs and roots. Spring air is sweet with promise, even before flowers begin to bloom. Once they do, the air becomes filled with seduction. Hyacinth and Tulips are just the beginning.

However complex, spring air can't begin to compare to a summer breeze. The rich perfumes of Lilac, Lily of the Valley, Viburnum, and Peony thrive in the moisture of summer air and enhance it. My days begin earlier, at dawn, and my pace slows as the day unfolds. Gentle winds drift across the farm fields that surround my house. Composting manure and newly mown alfalfa hay deepen the earthy, odorous mixture, making it bulky, almost crowded.

As temperatures rise, the heat of a summer day cooks juicy grasses, adding a richness to their fragrance and even more moisture to the air. Summer air has density. It bears a lustiness only it has the volume to contain. Trees become laden with fruit; vegetables grow fat on their vines. It's the smell of maturing, ripening. Summer air holds a promise the cycle will renew.

## Grandad shows Addy Forbidden Drive

### Ron Hevey

Six year-old Addy had grown so tall in three years. Lost the giggles, too. She had become quite the young lady since the last time her mother brought her from Hong Kong to visit Grandad.

We were off to Forbidden Drive in Philadelphia's Fairmount Park rather than to arboretums, institutes, or museums. The word "Forbidden" made Addy want to explore its mysteries. Addy's mother was more interested than Addy when I explained that Forbidden Drive served mills built by William Penn and that its road was made "forbidden" to automobiles when Fairmount Park was created last century.

A gaggle of ducks in the Wissahickon along Forbidden Drive greeted us. Addy kept an eye on them while she dug into her knapsack for a hot dog, pulled off pieces of bun and screamed as she flung bits to the quackers.

**Addy reveled as she collected leaves, roasted them as marshmallows, and offered them to Grandad. Later she explored caves and hop skipped along ancient dams, careful not to take a dunk in the Wissahickon, We adults dutifully did a photo-shoot.**

When we stopped at a shelter, Addy set up house, assigned seating to Grandad and her mother and doled out chores.

Grandad and Addy's mother were ready for lunch at lovely Valley Green Inn where my Diane joined us. Addy had her choice of crab-cakes, Philly cheesesteaks, and such goodies. No, she pulled her hot dog, sans bun, from the knapsack and ordered french fries.

In the afternoon Grandad wasn't sure about Addy's choice of Smith Memorial Park in the center-city, likely to be a "zoo" on a hot summer's day. Playing in the park reminded me of Spring Harbor days of old, where all we had was a sandbox and swings.

One hundred year-old Smith Memorial Park is dedicated to the positive effect that "unstructured, imaginative play can have on a child." Wow, that's progress.

Addy was off and running across safe, rubberized surfaces to a low-level tightrope on a tube which led to the main attraction, the Slide, where kids lined up, adults too, to play with each other. They placed "potato sacks" at the top of the wooden Slide, up to 12 abreast, and slid down sitting or face-first, screaming all the way. Most youngsters ran back for another slide.

At the teeter totters, Grandad joined in pushing and pulling. Swings, too, reminded us oldsters "don't swing too high and go flying off to hurt yourself."

On merry-go-rounds pushed fast, riders climbed through rope arrangements, a ride adults preferred to watch rather than join in.



Finished with outdoor attractions, Addy was eager for the 1890s Playhouse where she picked up a puppet to play.

We were surprised and delighted when a girl her age joined Addy, asking, "May I play house with you?"

New friends, the youngsters explored the doll house and roamed the room on scooters, creating a story with their puppets.

What a thrill to watch children raised half a world apart develop an instant friendship on common ground.

The day done, Grandad mentioned ice cream and Addy was ready to finish with a treat.

## **Procrastination...**

**Marv Borgman**

“It’s too late to do anything about it now,”  
I thought as I put down the phone - though I’d  
really intended to make the call in time,  
she’d somehow died before I’d allocated  
the time to dial across the miles and  
the long years to hear, one last time, her voice  
weakened by the cancer that her brother  
had told me, only two days ago,  
would soon still her pain, her love, her desire  
and her earthly ties to anyone and  
anything associated with this thing  
we call life - and then... setting aside  
my sorrow, regret and memories, I  
contemplated the deadline for entries to  
the SLAM practice round and noted that I  
still had eight hours, maybe even a bit more,  
which allowed me to consider mowing the lawn,  
a task I’d been putting off for far too long.

John Swift

**Novel fails to satisfy***Lost and Wanted*

Nell Freudenberger

Alfred A. Knopf, 2019

It's not a very satisfying book, not a fun read, and not believable, in the Aristotelian sense of verisimilitude, all of which means that it will probably win lots of awards.

It's a story about a truly gifted but lonely young woman and all the empty, broken, unfulfilled relationships of her life, all of the shouldas, wouldas, and couldas, the few happy times before all hell broke loose, the one remaining love of her life, her designer baby, born from a cyrobank, whom she endows with nearly supernatural powers, and her own designer god, this from a woman who doesn't believe in God.

Her best friend from college, who has grown away from her, dies in the first line of the book, and a colleague later mentions in an offhand way that he's heard that "so and so" is going to India to get married ("so and so" is her closest remaining friend, or so she thought).

**So the protagonist spends the rest of the book in periodic flashbacks, reliving and bemoaning. Her six-year-old amuses himself by building metaphase typewriters (something originally created by a physics group in Berkeley in the 70's to demonstrate quantum entanglement) if you can believe it. I can't.**

Without the warmth of human relationships that might help her grieve for her losses, she retreats into her job to seek satisfaction. If you're interested in the Laser Interferometer Gravitational Observatory or Quantum Entanglements, you might like this. Caveat emptor.

The title *Lost and Wanted* is an oblique reference to an Auden poem, "This Lunar Beauty," which also dealt with dreams and death, and this is not the only connection within this novel and Auden's poems.

*Cider With Rosie*

Laurie Lee,

Hogarth Press, 1959,

and Vintage Books, London, 2002

This book is the first of an autobiographical trilogy by Lee (1914-1997) describing his childhood. It was required reading in British schools for some time and may still be. At age three, Lee moved with his mother, three sisters and three brothers, to the hamlet of Slad in Gloucestershire, fairly close to the Cotswolds.

Some have argued that his memories at this age are too detailed to be true. Others have confirmed that many of his memories are true. Either way, like all good fiction, they seem true when read.

Here's his memory of being set down in tall grass at age three: "...I wept. [*The grass*] towered above me, each blade tattooed with tiger-skins of sunlight. It was knife-edged, dark and wicked green, thick as a forest and alive with grass-hoppers that chirped and chattered and leapt through the air like monkeys."

His memories of his mother and sisters: ***"I was perfectly content in this world of women, muddle-headed though it may be, to be bullied and tumbled through the hand-to-mouth days, patched up or dressed-up, scolded, admired, swept off my feet in sudden passions of kisses, or dumped forgotten among the unwashed pots."***

His first day of school, age four, sent with a hot baked potato in his pocket:

*"The playground roared like a rodeo...old boots, ragged stockings, torn trousers and skirts, went skating and skidding around me...grit flew in my face like shrapnel. Tall girls with frizzled hair, huge boys with sharp elbows began to prod me with hideous interest. They plucked at my scarves, spun me around like a top...and stole my potato."*

— **Review continues, next page**

Guardian reading group contributor Mythical Magpie adds this perspective: *"I think the skill of descriptive writing lies in evoking an image so clear and deep that the reader instinctively believes the subject is not only real but has always been as the writer sees it. It's a rare talent that Laurie Lee possessed. He immerses us completely in the mysterious journey of his ordinary childhood and all the emotional mouldering dark and sunlight contrasts it contained. It's not idyllic. It's heightened reality, and one of the most perfect examples of English literature ever created."*

Wikipedia thinks that Rosie was a distant cousin and that may well be. He stole her cider; she stole his virginity. But that's later in the book.

You can no longer live in the town of his childhood; motor vehicles and roads have completely changed it. But you can visit it with Laurie Lee and experience the herb-scented cave of darkness, among a thousand other sensual pleasures.

### *The Portrait of a Lady*

Henry James,

Penguin Group, 1882;

reprinted by Penguin Classics, London

James constructed a magnificent cathedral from a picture of an old landowner in England having tea with his cousin, a "confident young lady" from Albany, New York, and it pleased him to leave her a fortune so James could have something to write about. He wrote and wrote and wrote about it, and his cathedral has been reviewed to death. I want to take a closer look at the mortar between all those bricks, maybe do some tuck-pointing.

Someone has described James's writing technique as "analytical exhaustion" wherein every noun and adjective from the previous sentence is further exhaustively analyzed in detail using the Point of View of God so we get to know what everyone in town thought about it— and what they thought about their thoughts having thought them. It's all too exhausting. While this may serve to minutely describe a sense of place, or one of the petals on a boutonnière worn by one of the waiters, American readers, at least this one, prefer descriptive economy. James did not.

Isabel, our confident young lady protagonist, does not like prearranged or conventional circumstances; she prefers to live for the moment, never knowing what might be just around the

corner or over the hill. Given that she is about to inherit a large fortune, a good share of the non-planning risk might well be underwritten by her cash on hand.

**But we will need to see how she matures and changes in this story to evaluate the struggles that James will put her through. No struggles, no story. Her first "struggle" is to turn down the various bona fide marriage proposals she receives from those who love her and those who view her as a *bonne parti*, a lucky catch. This was an easy call for James; better to view your protagonist in the wild, so to speak.**

As James rounds out Isabel's character, he tells us that she is "very liable to the sin of self-esteem" and further that "she had seen very little of the evil in the world." If this were Greek Mythology and Isabel a Goddess, she would receive the fate of all those with hubris, death or something worse than death, a living hell.

However, James makes an egregious mistake when he permits Isabel to make a most unfortunate marriage, have a child, and lose that child to an illness all in a few paragraphs of narrative flashback, denying the reader the immediacy of fiction. James tells us about it years later.

If Isabel were to suffer the comeuppance of hubris, it would be here as the dawning realization of a horrible marriage, pregnancy, pain of childbirth, postpartum depression, and then the terrible shock of losing your child would threaten to throw most people over the edge.

Not with James and Isabel. With a few words, James dismisses this time in her life and has Isabel go hurtling on with her life in high society.

Thus I dismiss this story and doubt the grout that holds this cathedral together. James may have travelled the world and become well tuned to the nuances of 19<sup>th</sup> century manners among the upper classes in England, but I don't think he ever had a wife that lost a child.

### *The Rings of Saturn*

W. G. Sebald,

English translation 1998, Harvill Press

There are some books that, while they made their authors famous, are too dense to review, of



extremely limited interest, or might only appeal to Demetrius, Ptolemy's librarian in Alexandria tasked with collecting every book in the known world. W.G. Sebald's book, *The Rings of Saturn*, is such a book.

An unknown narrator interrupts his walking tour of East Anglia to imagine, and reimagine, a host of the mostly unimaginable things, under the guise of several characters or while assuming their identities, some of whom may be him or the author. He has ghostly hallucinations, during which he may be the ghost.

He imagines or hallucinates that everything in this universe, including Saturn, is spidered together by invisible threads of fate, duty, planning, chance, time, dread, destiny, death.

**We may call this style of writing *Sebaldian*, and it may be our duty to suffer through such a travelogue. The writing itself is straightforward but because of his constructions and labyrinthine connections turns out to be rather humorous and, I'm afraid, largely meaningless.**

Let me try to summarize one evening after dinner. The narrator sits on a bench looking out to sea as the sun sets. He feels as though he's sitting in a deserted theatre when the curtain rises to show the bloody battle of Sole Bay on May 18, 1672, when the Dutch come to press a trade dispute with many ships and cannons, and through the smoke and fire, he sees men jumping into the sea, battleships aflame, and burning masts falling on the overcrowded decks, which reminds him as the sky turns dark that hunters are out hunting in America and Persians are already past their first sleep, in fact, all creatures following the setting sun are settling into their beds, a half world of rows of prone bodies, as if "leveled by the scythe of Saturn," an endless graveyard, which reminds him further of a dream from years ago with its sharply imagined mountain crags and drifting clouds against a turquoise sky.

I won't go on, but he does, examining Rembrandt's portrait, *The Anatomy Lesson*, dozens of other images, plane trips, battles and wars through the ages, and the recorded message from Kurt Waldheim for the benefit of any extraterrestrials encountered by Voyager II as it passed by Saturn on its way to interstellar space, where it is now cruising, bringing one of Sebald's chapters, and this review, to an end.

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## *The Dutch House*

Ann Patchett

Harper Collins, 2019

There are times when one is lucky enough to find a great book and then feels sad as the book draws to an end, realizing he or she is saying last goodbyes to a favorite loved one. This is that great book, and the great author is Ann Patchett. So you slow down your reading, savoring those last few days immersed in your story. It's no longer just the author's story; you have become part of it.

A baby boy called Danny is born into the home of a struggling real estate developer. He has an older sister called Maeve, who dotes on her baby brother. Their father strikes it rich in real estate and moves them into a huge castle, complete with cooks, nannies, and caretakers.

The mother is not used to such opulence and deserts the family in favor of India where she can help the poor. The children settle into a life lovingly overseen by the cook, the nanny, and the caretaker. The father appears on weekends.

**Then a wicked stepmother, who covets the property, appears with her two young daughters, the father dies of a heart attack, and Danny and Maeve are banished from *The Dutch House*.**

They discover that their father had set up an educational trust fund that Maeve does her best to deplete before it devolves into the hands of the wicked stepmother by sending Danny to a boarding school, then medical school, despite his intention to follow in his father's footsteps. They struggle on.

The Hansel and Gretel of this story make a ritual of secretly revisiting the house from which they were exiled, attempting to spy on the wicked stepmother and her two daughters, who grow up and leave the wicked stepmother to her coveted possession. The ironic inversion of this story is that the dilapidation of *The Dutch House* appears in its occupants, not the house, which remains as magnificent as ever.

In the real world, people get old and die and couples get divorced, but some grow up to be doctors and rich real estate developers. I leave the discovery of that in yours and Patchett's hands. I assure you it will be a wonderful, unforgettable journey.

## Book Rave

MADONNA DRIES CHRISTENSEN

### Read this book

*Our Prince of Scribes: Writers Remember Pat Conroy*

edited by Nicole Seitz and Jonathan Haupt  
University of Georgia Press, 2019

I don't recall ever turning the last page of a book and wanting to begin again. It happened today. Such is the power of *Our Prince of Scribes: Writers Remember Pat Conroy*. It would need to be my own copy so I could highlight what I like best. But that would be pretty much everything.

If you treasure elegant, eloquent, articulate language, this is as close to perfection as you'll find. Several contributors mention that Conroy's sign-off to correspondence, telephone conversations, and in-person goodbyes was, "Great Love."

This collection by those who knew him overflows with great love.

### More words at play

*Sent to us by Mary Callahan*

A German walks into a bar and orders a martini. The bartender asks, "Dry?"  
The German responds, "Nein, just one."

How many surrealists does it take to screw in a lightbulb?

A fish.

There are 2 kinds of people in the world.  
Those that can extrapolate to finding missing information.

A Buddhist monk walks up to a hot dog vendor and says,  
"Make me one with everything."

A pun, a limerick, and a play on words walk into a bar. No joke.  
The joke was still parking the car.

"A man's face is his  
autobiography. A woman's  
face is her work of fiction."

--Oscar Wilde

ET 10

### COACH'S PICK TO CLICK

*The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek*

Kim Michele Richardson

Sourcebooks Inc, 2019

### Bearing witness

Most of us know that folks, even folks who had jobs, had it tough during the depression. Few had it tougher than the coal miners in the Appalachian Mountains of Kentucky.

The women who lived with them had it even tougher.

You know it. Now feel it. *Live* it— in the pages of this unforgettable novel, the story of a "book lady," Cussy Mary Carter, who rides the circuit on her mule, Junia, bringing books and periodicals to the hill folk of Troublesome Creek, Kentucky. They aren't just starved for food; they're starved for words, information, stories, and kindness, mental and spiritual sustenance.

You can read this book for the history it depicts so vividly, but you'll find yourself drawn in by the people and their stories.

**Ms. Richardson lets us see, hear, taste, and smell life as these folks live it. The description is precise and unsparing, creating mood and texture and carrying the story and its themes forward.**

A taste:

In the yard two crows drank from mud puddles. Overhead more cawed before dropping down to scar the yard. Two sick chickens peeked around the corner of the cabin, their combs and wattles festered with the fowl pox. A rawboned dog dozed on the crumbling porch. Junia snorted, and the pup raised its mangy body and flattened its flea-bitten ears before slinking off.

This old land had more dead stirring than sleeping, and Henry's mama, a pale, gaunt spirit, bore witness as she opened the door.

At the back of the novel, the publisher includes archival photographs of some of the real book ladies of Hindman, Kentucky, who comprised Roosevelt's Kentucky Pack Horse Library Project, giving testimony to the historical foundation for the novel. But Richardson will have already given you much more vivid pictures and stories.

If you read this book, you'll carry the memory of it with you.

## **Fifty Years** **Marv Borgman**

*It's been 50 years  
Tho it seems but  
A heartbeat  
Since we two  
Became one*

*I sometimes  
wonder where  
It's all gone until  
I begin to recount  
The pleasantries  
The blessings  
The heartaches*

*The outright love  
The hidden strength  
Of this little woman*

*KC, Gwang Cha  
Some say  
Kwang Cha*

*My rock of ages  
My compass in  
The darkness  
My love in the light  
My everything*

*It's been 50 years*

---

### **LAST LOOKS BACK AT SUMMER** **Ode to fiberglass—** **I brake for Wisconsin's** **roadside attractions**



**Rhinelanders' ferocious Hodag**

It's worth getting off the Interstate to view some of the real wonders of the world.

Yes, Mount Rushmore is more than worth the winding drive up the mountain to see the great stone faces— but small town Wisconsin has a wealth of lesser-known wonders.

In little Wabeno, (pop 1,000 or so) you can pay homage to 22-foot-tall Larry the Logroller. There's even a Logging Museum right next to him, has been since 1941.

Or how about the world's largest soup kettle, in little Laona, just a half-hour up the road.

**Rhinelanders has its iconic Hodag (pictured above), described in a *New York Times* story as “a sort of frog-faced dinosaur.”**

Giant Muffler Man used to stand guard over an actual muffler repair business. The business is long gone, but the giant muffler men still keeps his vigil over a large open field.

In Wisconsin Dells, with more lights per square inch than Las Vegas, a titanic cowboy stands, hands outstretched, looking confused, in front of an outlet mall

Another cowboy, in Spooner, guards a go-kart track and mini-golf course.

Way up north in Ashland, a giant muskie houses the Fisherman's Hall of Fame. My father's name is there; he belongs in any hall of fame for fishermen anywhere.

The entrance to Memorial Park in Shell Lake has a huge fiberglass Walleye.

Phillips is home to a whole park full of effigies, Fred Smith's Wisconsin Concrete Park, each made of concrete and broken Rhinelanders "Shorty Export" beer bottles from Fred's saloon.

**LILY'S  
LAST  
LOOK  
AT SUMMER**



**Lily gets up close and personal at Schuster's Farm.**



## Turning 90 in style

### Pernetta Deemer

Dorothy, Louie and I left on the fifth of July, heading for Louisville, KY, to have dinner with my friend Joyce. I had known her since we were in junior high in the early 40's. She is well and widowed, living on her own as am I.

Her son Steve and his wife Mary joined us, so we were six. We went to a restaurant, and it was very nice, white tablecloth, good food and lots of things to talk about. Steve and Louie hit it off very nicely talking about music.

*After a delicious dinner, Joyce invited Dorothy and Louie and me back to her house to have some ice cream. Steve and Mary felt they had to go home. It was so nice to be in Joyce's home with no restaurant background noise. I had visited her a few years ago when I went to North Carolina for making pottery.*

I had reserved rooms for us at a Red Roof Inn - a little over half the price of the first place I had looked at. This was clean and snug and served us well.

**When daughter Betsy first e-mailed news of our gathering and that we would be celebrating my 90th birthday, I requested "No presents, just your presence," and they were very good about listening to me.**

Heading out after the night in Louisville, we made it to Campton in the National Forest in eastern Kentucky at about 4:00. Betsy had rented houses for us, first two, then a third, then even a fourth. We were 27 for sleeping. My brother Tom and his wife Lee live in Winchester near Lexington, a little over an hour away, so they didn't stay over night.

Tom's daughter Maxine was with us, and all the rest were my descendants: two sons, two daughters and their mates, grandchildren and great grandchildren. At one point, grandson Chris, just now 30, observed some great-grandchildren running around and exclaimed, "Where did all these little people come from?"

One day we went to a cave that had been a granite mine. Water started to come into the mine and they tried pumping it out, but that became impractical. Now people take kayaks or go on a boat into the mine.

**I was on the boat with Dorothy and Louie. When we were way back in there, the guides wanted to show us how dark it could really be. They turned off their flashlights, and then all the people on the boat sang Happy Birthday to me.**

On another day we went up a chairlift way up the mountain. Then you look out over the forest and see mountains miles away. It was breathtaking.

On my birthday we went to a park for a picnic. There was a wide shallow stream where we took off our shoes and socks and went wading. Some even went swimming in the pond down below. We had hot dogs and hamburgers and a bunch of cupcakes. Then Betsy started reading a series of accolades she had requested from family members.

People said such lovely things that I had meant to them over the years. I was so touched. Dorothy was involved in this project as well. Betsy is putting these statements into a book with lots of pictures. I remember her grouping son Chris and his wife and all the kids and grandkids that are in his line for a picture. She did that for each of my four kids. She has it on Facebook - WOW! I think everybody should get to turn 90 - they made it a pretty special experience for me.

**WE'VE GOT  
EMAIL!**



## **YOUR RESPONSES TO LAST ISSUE**

The Ogden Nash like verses by Gary Busha made me LOL. Also, the poem about geraniums was clever. Beautiful photo of Lily. How old is she now?

**Madonna Dries Christensen**  
*Gulp. Seven— already!*

Marsh,  
Thanks for running so many of my poems in 109. You picked some of the strong ones, and I thought you would, being the great editor that you are. Congrats again on such a fine issue. I wish you continued success in your excellent work.

**Gary Busha**  
*You're on my short list of favorite poets.*

Hi, Marshall,  
Sorry to hear about your dog Pixie. We've said goodbye to four dogs already in our marriage, and our fifth is 13 years old, so I know exactly where you're at. Just remember that the good memories are the ones that stick with us.

I also liked the photo of Lily in the garden. How she's grown (no pun intended)!

**Leah Carson**  
*Take the booing and hissing like the courageous punster you are. And thanks for sharing my sorrow at losing a dear family member.*

### **RHYME TIME**

Hi Coach,  
I think this: south rhymes with mouth!  
Have a good day.

**Diane Dennis**

\_\_\_\_\_  
EI 14

Ĥmmmmmm. Sounds right to me. Sounded right to Gloria Wheeler and Cary Ramey, too, and they, too, wrote in to say so. And Catherine Erdhem had a lot to say about rhymes.

Hi Marshall.

I just read and enjoyed EI #109 but was perplexed by the rhyme challenge. Isn't it true that the word 'south' rhymes with 'mouth'? Also according to my rhyming dictionary: bad-mouth, loudmouth, blabbermouth, cotton-mouth, hand-to-mouth, and word-of-mouth. And then of course, there's 'uncouth' which is a sight rhyme.

For 'angel' I think 'fragile' will work, and depending upon how narrow your definition of rhyme is, there's a whole host of "ile" (agile) and "el" (bluebell) -ending words – including the word 'gel'.

I'll admit, though, 'bulb' has me stumped. The closest I can come is pulp which, if you say it with a German immigrant accent in English, comes out like an overlay.

I'll be curious if you get more mail with this.  
:) Cheers,

**Catherine Erdhem**  
*I do love sight rhymes like "south" and "couth," more proof that English is crazy. Thanks to all who wrote on the topic.*

Thanks, Marshall, for another fine issue of *Extra Innings*. The baseball story was astounding. Thanks, too, for including my racing story in this issue. Sincerely,

**Ed Pahnke**

All-organic, sugar-free, gluten-free, raised by monks, and distributed by elves. It's delicious! Hope you are well, and Happy Halloween ☺

**Kerrie Osborne**  
*And a merry Christmas to you. Remember, this newsletter is composed of 100% recycled pixels.*

Awesome!

**Mary Earll, Library Director, Sibley  
(IA) Public Library**

Oh, that's lovely! I'm going to share it with my manager and co-workers.

**Laurie Bates-Weir, Librarian, Gulf Gate  
Library, Sarasota, FL**

That is such a fun article. Thank you! I will share it with my library director.

**Nancy Tupper Ling, Outreach Librarian,  
Morrill Memorial Library, Norwood, MA**

What a wonderful article. I'm honored that you included me.

**Kathryn Kelley, Radford, VA Public  
Library**

This is what I remember as a youngster: climbing the steps to the library, opening the outer doors, stepping into a foyer, and looking up to see a huge oak desk with the the librarian sitting behind it. Reminds me of Dorothy visiting the Wizard of Oz; I so wanted to speak to her, but at the same time I was terrified. She was all-knowing and royalty in my eyes.

**Larry Pedley, Sibley, IA, owner of Max  
Theatres:**

#### **MORE ON 109**

Good column! Loved the variety in the 26 pages. An enjoyable collection.

**Susanne Bunch, writer**

Hi Marsh!

I just read the latest issue and enjoyed it much. Loved the picture of Lily. She's like a little fairy in her garden!

Thanks for all that you do!

**JoAnn Nishiura**

Hi Coach,

Thank you for letting me share my story about Putty with your readers.

Update: Unfortunately, another stray got into a fight with Putty on our driveway earlier this summer, and Putty has not come back. I did spot him on a walk a few weeks ago, but he would not come to me when I called him. I miss Putty. We both learned to trust each other. I'm hoping I'll see him when it gets colder.

**Randi Mvros**

Hey Marsh,

Kudos on the latest '*EXTRA INNINGS*' — thoroughly enjoyable! A couple of contributions for the next— just in time for National Punctuation Day: what's the dot over the letter 'i' called? [a 'tittle' - the one over the 'j' too]. Also, another word without a rhyming counterpart would be 'silver.'

One of my favorite references is that a group of hummingbirds is called a 'charm'. Lovely! You may want to check the veracity of these - I've been known to make things up!

**Keith Wheeler**

*A crush of kudo's to you for your letter, Keith. I like a man who knows his jot from his tiddle, and a happy National Punctuation Day to you. Now we prepare for National Exclamation Point Day!*

*"A charm of hummingbirds" seems just right. Also good: "a congress of cardinals." But best by far: "a murder of crows."*

*Owls seldom get together, but when they do, it's a "parliament." Why not a "hoot"?*

*No matter what you call the birds, they should be on the lookout for "a kindle of kittens." That collective noun makes no sense to me. Shouldn't it be "a cute of kittens"? And "a drool of puppies?"*

## He wrote the words that the Dead sang

**Jennifer Finney Boylan**

It was the first time he'd ever been to England, a place he'd been dreaming of his entire life. Now Robert Hunter, the poet and Grateful Dead lyricist, had been left alone in a London hotel room with a whole case of retsina, a resinated Greek wine with the color of sunlight and the taste of turpentine.

"Mind you," Mr. Hunter said later, "I only drank about half a bottle of the retsina. But it was having the whole case there that was important."

This was back in 1970. He sat down at a desk and wrote the lyrics for "Ripple," one of the Dead's sweetest songs, a piece that includes the line, "Let it be known there is a fountain that was not made by the hands of men."

It concludes, "If I knew the way, I would take you home."

Later that same day he wrote the words for "Brokedown Palace" and "To Lay Me Down," two more songs that became classics, at least to a certain demographic.

**The Grateful Dead had their own poet. Mr. Hunter — who died in September at the age of 78. He never sang on a record or played an instrument with the band, but he wrote the words for their most iconic songs: "Truckin'," "Uncle John's Band," "Friend of the Devil" and more.**

Mr. Hunter refused to explain what his words meant, preferring to let the songs speak for themselves.

In making the 2017 documentary "Long Strange Trip," Amir Bar-Lev managed to get the reclusive Mr. Hunter on film. In that interview, Mr. Hunter recited the inscrutable lyrics to "Dark Star," ("Glass hand dissolving in ice petal flowers revolving,") and then simply stated, "It says what it means," as if this were self-evident. And who knows? Perhaps it was.



**Robert Hunter (left) with the head of the Dead, Jerry Garcia**

It takes a particular form of genius to sustain an artistic collaboration, a relationship that may have more in common with a marriage than a business. John Lennon and Paul McCartney brought out the best in each other — for a while, anyway. So did Gilbert and Sullivan, Simon and Garfunkel, and the Everly Brothers. It's not always clear where Gillian Welch's songs end and David Rawlings's begin; Mr. Rawlings has described himself as "one half of a group called 'Gillian Welch.'"

Robert Hunter would have bristled if anyone had the gall to suggest he was half of a group called "Jerry Garcia." But he did possess an uncanny ability to find the words that expressed the heart of his friend. They'd met as teenagers in Palo Alto, California in 1961, at a local production of the musical "Damn Yankees," and it is lovely to think of those two young men sitting side by side, listening to the song "Heart": "You've gotta have heart/ All you really need is heart/ When the odds are saying you'll never win /That's when the grin should start."

In their long years as partners, the two would do a lot of grinning. They would weep sometimes, too.



## E.I. Celebrations of Life

€I 17

### Lee Botts

February 25, 1928 -October 5, 2019

*Champion of the Great Lakes*

She fought hard and effectively to protect the Greek Lakes basin.

Growing up on the parched earth of the Oklahoma dust bowl may have fueled her passion to protect the earth, which she did for seven decades as writer, grass-roots organizer, educator, and government official.

*The New York Times* said, “[Her] work would touch practically every drop of water and every mile of shoreline in the Great Lakes basin and educated tens of thousands of people.”

She was born Leila Carman in Mooreland, Oklahoma. Her father was a contractor, her mother a homemaker. She had a younger brother.

She retired in 1988 but never stopped working. In the 1990s she was invited to keynote international conferences in Russia and Estonia and consult on measures to protect rivers and lakes in the former Soviet Union.

### Nick Tosches

October 23, 1949 — October 20, 2019

*Biographer of the famous*

He started out in the late 60s as a music critic for rock and country music and then branched out to biographies of the likes of Dean Martin and Sonny Liston.

Tosches (TOSH-es) published his first book, *Country*, in 1977, profiling country’s lesser-known rogues. He followed that with *Unsung Heroes of Rock ‘n’ Roll* in 1984.

His first biography, *Hellfire: The Jerry Lee Lewis Story*, came out in 1986, and he received a lot of attention for his biography *Dino: Living High in the Dirty Business of Dreams*, about Dean Martin.

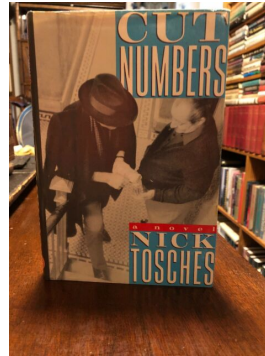
“I would describe Dean as a noble character in an ignoble racket in an ignoble age,” he told *The New York Times* in 1992.

“Life is a racket,” he added. “Writing is a racket. Sincerity is a racket. Everything’s a racket.”

He told the *Times* he wanted to be a garbage man, “because they got to ride on the side of the trucks— and a writer.”

His father owned a bar, where young Tosches got what he called “the type of street-smart education that mattered. His many jobs included being a snake hunter for the Miami Serpentarium.

He sold his first article for *Fusion*, a Boston magazine, in 1969 and wrote for *Fusion*, *Rolling Stone*, *Creem* and other publications. He was known to write reviews of non-existent novels.



His first novel, *Cut Numbers*, came out in 1988, followed by *Trinities*, about the international heroin trade, in 1994. An article he wrote for *Vanity Fair* on boxer Sonny Liston became a biography, *The Devil and Sonny Liston*, in 2000.

In his 2002 novel, *In the Hand of Dante*, published in 2002, he injects a character named Nick Tosches into the life of Dante. “It’s a kind of a mess,” the *NY Times* said in a review by Will Blythe, “but a splendid, passionate mess, with a moral fervor far exceeding most novels of better grooming.”

Dennis Chute, a reviewer for the *Edmonton Journal* of Alberta, called Tosches “a puffed-up buffoon whose bio is a pile of horse manure... one of the few writers you can experience on a visceral level. Reading Tosches is like being mugged.”

In the *Denver Post*, John Broening called his novel *Me and the Devil* (2012) “a series of self-aggrandizing pornographic daydreams.”

In 2006 the British publication *Observer Music Monthly* named Tosches’ Jerry Lee Lewis bio first on the list of the 50 greatest music books ever written.”

*Thanks to Neil Genzinger’s obituary in the New York Times, October 21, 2002.*

## Lotte Reiniger

June 2, 1899 — June 19, 1981

### *Pioneering animator*

A decade before Disney, Lotte Reiniger was one of the pioneers of animation. For 60 years she created more than 70 silhouette animation films, including versions of *Cinderella*, *Hansel and Gretel*, and her best known project, the 1926 silent film, *The Adventures of Prince Achmed*, an adaptation of *The Arabian Nights*.

Born in Berlin, she studied *scherschitte*, the art of cutting shapes and designs in paper with scissors. She created silhouettes of people, including family members, and used them for playacting, constructing a little shadow theater to do Shakespeare. (From *Sight and Sound Magazine*.)

She caught the attention of film director and actor Paul Wegener, who hired her for his 1918 film *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*. She helped animate wooden puppet rats.

She was admitted to the Institute of Cultural Research in Berlin, where she met art historian Carl Koch, who became her husband and collaborator.

She also studied at the Berlin Zoo, watching how animals moved.

She created an early version of the multilane camera, which gave depth to two-dimensional animation.

Her final films included *The Rose and the Ring* (1979).

From an obituary by Devi Lockwood in the “Overlooked no longer” series in The New York Times for October 21, 2019



## Professor Woodie Flowers

November 18, 1943 — October 11, 2019

### *Master teacher and innovator*

Woodie Flowers, an innovative and flamboyant mechanical engineering professor at M.I.T. (he liked to roller-blade and ride unicycles through its halls) championed a hands-on learning philosophy that reshaped engineering and design education and turned him into something of a celebrity.

He gained renown through his undergraduate course at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2.70 Introduction to Design, which he started teaching in the 1970s.

He began the course by giving his students “creativity kits,” paper bags full of things like paper clips, screws, bolts, and wire. He split them into teams and, with him as their guide, had them spend the semester designing robotic devices to do things like place square pegs in a round hole.

The teams competed before an audience at the end of the semester to see which device had solves the problem the best, and PBS broadcast it for years on *Discover: The World of Science*.

Because of him, most engineering schools now offer project-oriented, hands-on courses as part of the curriculum.

Entrepreneur Dean Kamen recruited Flowers in 1992 to adapt the course for teams of high school students in the FIRST Robotics Competition (“Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology”).

That competition featured 28 teams in a Manchester, N.H. high school gym. It grew into a global phenomenon, with thousands of teams in more than 100 countries.

Flowers was born in Jena, Louisiana. His mother was an elementary-school teacher, his father a welder and inventor.

He married Margaret Was, a fellow engineering student who became his lifelong colleague and collaborator.

He was an avid nature photographer, attended trapeze school, took polo lessons, and learned to scuba dive, sky-dive, and drive race cars, usually with his wife as partner.

From an Obituary by Glenn Rifkin in the New York Times, October 25, 2019

## Stephen Bruce Ditchik, 83

June 6, 1936 — Nov 6, 2019

### *author*

Using the pen name Stephen Dixon, he published over 600 stories and 18 novels, which were called “experimental,” “idiosyncratic,” “compelling,” and “challenging.” He never achieved fame or earned big money but won favor with critics and with a devoted readership.

His paragraphs could be dauntingly long. He told several versions of the same event in the novel *Interstate* (1991). In the story “Wife in

Reverse” he began with a woman’s death and ended years earlier, when she meets her husband.

He taught writing seminars at Johns Hopkins University for 27 years, retiring in 2007.

His work won O’Henry Awards and Pushcart Prizes, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and two National Endowment of the Arts grants. He was twice a finalist for the National Book Award.

Just before Dixon turned four, his father was convicted of extorting money from doctors who were performing illegal abortions and was incarcerated in Sing Sing. His mother changed the family name to Dixon. At 10, Stephen learned what his father had done when he found court documents in the family’s basement.

Dixon worked for pulp crime magazines and was a radio reporter and an editor at CBS News. But when he started writing short stories, he found his life’s work.

He won a fellowship at Stanford University in 1963, publishing his first short story that year in the *Paris Review*.

He was married to Anne Frydman, a poet, translator, and Chekhov scholar, who predeceased him in 2009. He continued to write until recently, despite Parkinson’s and arthritis.

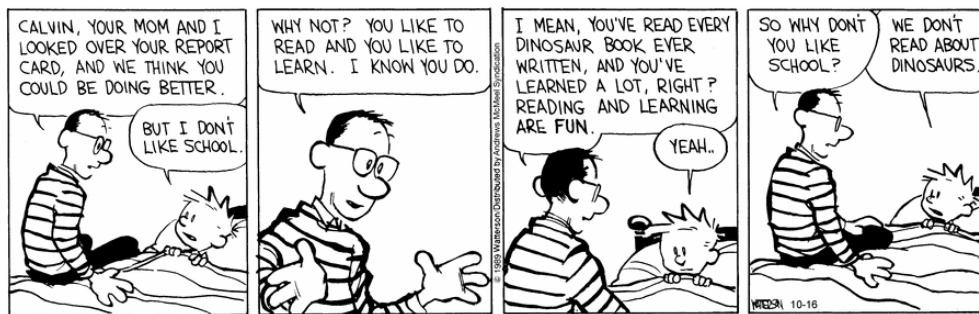
## Bloody November

*Novemberish*, means “dreary.” The month’s original name in Old English was *Blōtmōnāð*, literally “blood-month.” November was the month of heavy animal sacrifice, when the early Saxons would stock up on food for the winter.

## Election Day

Keith George

Sitting in the cafe on election morn  
 Almost made me sorry I was ever born  
 Trumpsters near the window  
 Never-Trumpers scattered 'round  
 Just one thing in common: A devotion  
 to hash browns  
 "Read The Transcript" blared a shirt nearly  
 touching my elbow  
 At the bar another claimed "He Pulled A  
 Quid Pro Quo"  
 I feared some bruiser might jump up and  
 take a crack at me  
 Once a respected journalist, now the  
 people's enemy  
 I had an excellent defense should shove  
 come to push  
 If there was looming danger of boot prints  
 on my tush  
 While my pony tail might indicate  
 a liberal tendency  
 I was founding president of Harpur College  
 Young GOP  
 As I left I could but wonder which party  
 would get beat  
 Would yeas vanquish nays, with fighting in  
 the street?  
 But the raw vote warmed the heart of this  
 doddering octogenarian  
 Our new DA was neither red nor blue,  
 we had voted Libertarian



The wisdom  
 of Calvin  
 and Hobbes

BARBARA BURRIS

## Submission to first-choice publisher leads to publication, job offer

Hobby magazine publisher Kalmbach Media announced the promotion of David Popp to oversee the new digital collective, Trains.com, an umbrella site expected to launch next year for *Model Railroader*, *Trains*, *Classic Trains*, *Classic Toy Trains* and *Garden Railways* magazines. Serving as executive producer, Popp will apply his experience leading Kalmbach's launch of *Model Railroader Video Plus* (MRVP), a digital video subscription service which has amassed 11,000 paying subscribers since its launch in 2013.

**David's need to touch things, take them apart, figure out how they went back together, drove his parents crazy. Daddy called him 'Fingers', a nickname we still occasionally tease him with.**

Mom, Daddy and I indulged him, allowing him to touch things that made his parents nervous. We watched him assess each item's texture, its weight, moving it from his left hand to his right, as though taking in different aspects of it with each side of his brain. His mom (my sister), worried he'd break something irreplaceable.

I was 15 when David was born, and we grew up to be more like siblings than aunt and nephew. We shared a lot of the same interests, including a love of writing that took him down the road of becoming a high school English teacher.

We were visiting my sister's home for dinner one evening when David asked me to read something he'd written. It was a how-to article about model-making for train layouts. I liked it and asked where he planned to submit it. He told me he had two options. His preference was *Model Railroader*, the premier magazine by Kalmbach Publishing in Wisconsin. But he felt a little intimidated by it, so he asked whether he should submit to the second, smaller magazine first.



**I reassured him Kalmbach wouldn't send him a scathing rejection letter if his piece didn't suit their needs and told him he should always send submissions to his favored choice first.**

The editor called to talk to him about publishing the piece. He invited David to visit their offices for a tour that led to an interview. Before long, he made David a job offer, which David accepted. The work suited him. It combined his writing skills with his love of building elaborate train layouts. He traveled the country meeting train enthusiasts and photographing their layouts for the magazine. He appeared on television shows, hosted how-to videos, and wrote articles and books. When Kalmbach decided they needed to expand into the computer world, David spearheaded their on-line video site.

Last year, *Folio Magazine* chose him as one of their *Folio 100*, a list comprised of the "brightest, most impactful minds in the magazine media industry today." And just this week, they announced he will be Executive Producer of Kalmbach's new digital collective, Trains.com, that will combine input from five of their magazines. The editors of these magazines will report to David.— that kid we called Fingers. The one who couldn't keep his hands off anything and everything.

MARSHALL J. COOK

## Crutch words can like totally cripple your communication... literally!

We use crutch words to try to shore up our sentences because we're afraid they'll fall on their arses without them. But they all send the same message: "I'm not sure what I'm talking about."

In speech, common crutches are nothing more than grunts: "um, ah, er, uh." We say them all the time, and they don't hurt much unless usage becomes so excessive it calls attention to itself.

In writing, where every unnecessary syllable you slaughter is a good deed done, we need to weed them out relentlessly.

Here are some prime examples with their real meanings.

**Word—"Well":** Meaning— "The rest of this sentence doesn't mean anything important."

**So:** Buying time while you figure out what to say.

**Literally:** Usually used inaccurately, when you mean "figuratively." It's meant to give a sentence more power but has the opposite effect. "The rain literally turned our yard into a swimming pool." Naw, it didn't.

**Look:** Translation— "Listen up, you idiot."

**Awesome:** The word inspires no awe.

**Honestly:** You're lying the rest of the time?

**Seriously:** You'd kidding the rest of the time?

**Totally:** If used literally and factually, it can be effective: "The deluge totally rained out the picnic we had planned." But "the deluge totally turned my back yard like into a lake." Naw.

**Basically:** Used to signal truth, simplicity, confidence, and authority. It does none of these.

**Really:** Really?

**Like:** A habit, a tic, a timeout. Like totally.

**For what it's worth:** You want it to imply "it's worth a lot," but the reader receives "It's not worth much."

**Obviously:** Translation: "If you don't already know this, you're stupid."

**You know:** Perhaps the most annoying verbal tic, you know. Like totally.

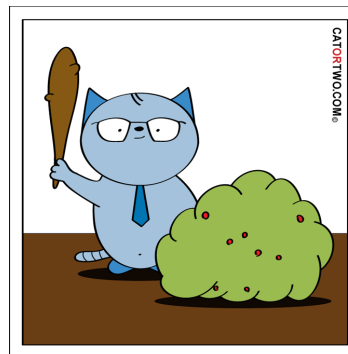
But everybody uses stuff like that, you say.

Another good reason not to use it, I say.



The doctor asked me to make a list of the exercises I do every day. Here's what I wrote:

I jump to conclusions,  
climb the walls,  
drag my heels,  
push my luck,  
make mountains out of  
molehills,  
bend over backward,  
put my foot in my mouth,  
beat around the bush.





## Police still seek hot loo

Back in September, person or persons unknown stole an object d'art from Blenheim Palace, birthplace of Winston Churchill, near Woodstock, England.

The artwork is called "America," by Maurizio Cattelan. Made out of 18-karat gold, it's valued at \$4 million dollars.

It's a fully-functioning toilet.

The Thames Valley Police are still looking for the thief or thieves and the solid-gold throne.

When Lacey Chandler heard about the missing loo, she spoke with the wisdom of her nine years. "Why would someone steal a gold toilet?" she pondered. "Someone's bum's been on that." Alex Marshall, *New York Times*, November 23, 2019.

## Bah Humbug

It was illegal to celebrate Christmas in Massachusetts from 1659-1681.

## What's the record for most drops?

Michael Ferreri holds the world record for the most juggling catches in one minute— 558.

## E-Bay. Eeeeeee-gads!

In 2000, a North Carolina man sold "The Meaning of Life" on EBay. It sold for \$3.26.

Ten-year-old Zoe Pemberton put her "cuddly but annoying" Grandmother up for sale on EBay in 2009. The bidding reached \$22,449 before the site shut it down.

What would you bid for a hunk of ABC ("Already Been Chewed") gum if the chewer was Britney Spears? Somebody bid \$14,000 on EBay.

What am I bid for this Blatz beer can once chugged by Julius Caesar?

## The whole world is listening

A team of scientists at Bell Laboratories invented the first transistor technology on October 18, 1947. The first transistor radio, the Regency TR- turned on immediately, weighed half a pound, and could fit in your pocket. It cost \$49.95, and they sold more than 100,000 of them.

A Japanese company called Tokyo Tushin Kogyo manufactured the portable wonders. They wanted an easy-to-pronounce name for it, looked up the Latin word for sound, "sonus," and the Sony portable radio was born.

## Sport keeps stats on everything

Recently the ice hockey Los Angeles Kings broke a record before the puck even hit the ice— largest laser light show. A *Guinness Book of World Records* official was on hand to verify the event as the Kings used 642 lasers to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the opening of their home arena, the Staples Center. The previous record had been a mere 342.

## A little life lesson in logic

Ray Magliozzi, the surviving brother of Car Talk fame, received this query recently:

"I got gas from Sam's and my 2001 Honda Civic started misfiring. I changed the spark plugs and air filter. I put HEET, gas treatment, and injector cleaner in the gas tank, but the engine is still misfiring.—AJ

Ray's response: "I got gas at Sam's once, too, and I haven't eaten there since. There's something law students learn called the 'post hoc fallacy,' AJ. ... In Latin, it says "post hoc ergo proper hoc." That's Latin for "Nuh uh, wasn't Sam's fault."

The translation is actually "after this, because of this," the assumption that because event Y happened right after Event X, then Event X must have caused Event Y. But that's not always true. As Ray says. "If you start dating your secretary and your gutters start to leak, the first event did not necessarily cause the second event. If you start dating your secretary and then you find yourself divorced, living in a washing machine box and grilling squirrels under a bridge, then X caused Y."

The verdict— more likely the misfiring is related to the fact that AJ's car is 18 years old.

BTW, to this day, Ray says neither he nor Tom ever knew which one was supposed to be "Click" and which one was "Clack."

## Eyes on ice

According to our pal Ripley, Albert Einstein's eyes are in a safe deposit box in New York City.

### Idiom Dept:



## Brevity

By Dan Thompson



## The referees really have gone nuts

Amidst growing anger over poor refereeing in pro and college football, this one really set folks off. Two college football teams got nailed with team-wide unsportsmanlike conduct penalties—the entire rosters of both teams—for dancing.

It happened between the third and fourth quarters of the Georgia versus Southern - Coastal Carolina game. Georgia Southern traditionally plays a “hype” song to get the fans dancing. The Georgia players usually dance to the song. This time Coastal Carolina created a dance-off to “Mo Bamba.”

So each player on each team's roster received an “unsportsman-like conduct” penalty. One of the players had already gotten one during the game, and two brings banishment, so he was thrown out of the game.

Georgia Southern won 30-27 in triple overtime.

## Your research dollars at work

A study conducted by the University of Vermont indicates that people with blue eyes have a higher alcohol tolerance.

## The worst pain in the world

On a recent episode of the Dan Patrick Show, Dan asked Daryl “Moose” Johnson, former National Football League player known for his toughness, what the worst pain he ever experienced was.

“The back,” Moose replied instantly. “Nerve pain in the back is the worst.”

Moose thus verified what many of us already knew: there's nothing worse than a pain in the arse.

## A bride by any other name

### would smell as sweet

After the I do's, the one performing the wedding usually says, “I now present, for the very first time, Mr. and Mrs....” The officiant might have wanted to skip that part of the wedding. If the new Mrs. Biagotti decided to hyphenate, she'd be “Mrs. Jonathan Longponpan-Biagotti.”

## Were you a phubber today?

Have you ever ignored a real live human being to look at your phone? There's a word for that: “Phubbing.”

A 2018 Deloitte survey revealed that Americans look at their cell phones 52 times a day. Tech insurance and support company Assurions 2018 put the number at 80 times a day. “Tech neck” is becoming a recognized public health crisis.

## Madison gets Ripley's attention

“Believe it or not, the official bird of Madison, Wisconsin, is the plastic pink flamingo.”

## Students fill local news void

Student journalists across the country have stepped in to help fill a void after more than 2,000 newspapers have closed or merged, leaving more than 1,300 communities without any local news coverage. Several young reporters have broken consequential stories that have prodded powerful institutions into changing policies.

Despite little training and no university journalism program, the staff of *The Michigan Daily* has embraced its vital role. Last year, in the wake of the #MeToo movement, it published a lengthy investigation that detailed sexual misconduct allegations against a professor, leading to his early retirement. In 2014, the paper published a major scoop about a sexual assault

that the university concealed to protect a football player.

*The Daily* also covers issues that matter to Ann Arbor's 121,000 residents, such as the inner workings of the municipal government, cuts to the county's mental health budget, and a police oversight commission that was created last year in response to the shooting death of a black woman and the violent arrest of a black teenager.

"We've been given this mantle of holding the powerful accountable, five nights a week, with no department backing us up," said Finntan Storer, 21, the managing editor of *The Daily*. "It's a huge responsibility."

Its website captures about half a million page views every month, and the staff has created four podcasts, including a weekly news podcast that covers city issues.

*From a story by Dan Levin, The New York Times*

### Walk the line

I have it on good authority (Ripley's 'Believe It Or Not') that a single pencil can draw a straight line 35 miles long. The pencil is mightier than the pen. Guess that puts the sword in third place.

### Poems for parents

In 2018 John Kenney, a contributor to *The New Yorker*, published *Love Poems (for Married People)*. Now he's come out with a new tome, *Love Poems (for People with Children)*, meditations on things like baby wipes, preschool artwork, and sleep deprivation.

I heard him recite and discuss on a recent edition of "Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me," billed as the NPR news quiz and the funniest show ever. "What you call sex" Kenney noted, "I call a wonderful time to make a mental list" and "3:32 a.m. and I am sure the infant is taunting me."

Kenney has two kids of his own but insists his life is perfect. "I have a lot of parent friends, and I will send out an email saying: Give me your tired and poor and worst situations' and we try to turn those into poems," he explains.

The book isn't all snark. He wrote a serious poem for his wife and then one for his two kids, Lulu and Hewitt. It goes, in part:

Every night  
before you go to sleep  
I lean down and  
whisper the same sentence.

In a lifetime of questions  
and confusion  
they are the truest words I know.

*I am so lucky to be your dad.*

### Your word of the day is...

**"Exonym":** a name given by people of one group to refer to another group. Good examples are every Native American tribal name you've ever encountered and even concepts like "Indian chief." Most indigenous tribes don't have chiefs.

### You have to be a fast learner

I didn't realize I was supposed to know how to do everything by my second rodeo. Seems like a very small amount of rodeos.

### Are you doing your part?

Every second— every *second!*— Americans purchase 350 slices of pizza.

That's a lotta mozzarella.

### Victor Frankenstein's monster

was a vegetarian, No grinding of bones to make his bread.

### Uh, you did know...

Frankenstein was the doctor, not the monster.

### Don't fence them in

The largest Amazon warehouse is in Schertz, Texas. It's the size of 22 American football fields. Schertz occupies parts of Guadalupe, Bexar, and Comal counties

### Whisper tweet nothings?

### Not these birds

The mating call of the white bellbird is said to be louder than a jackhammer. The male blasts his love song directly into the face of the object of his affectations.



Noisy birdie!



## Today's special is squashed possum

A new California law makes it legal for motorists to eat their roadkill. You have to hit the poor thing by accident though. No targeting allowed.

## Worldwide membership?

Founded in the 1950s, The Flat Earth Society once boasted a membership of 3,500 flatheads. Numbers have dwindled, but the Society still claims to have members all around the world.

All *around* the world.

## You know you're a geek if...

you were president of your high school's Latin Chess Club.

## Leading a double life

Mild-mannered Senator Mitt Romney (R-Utah) has a secret identity. On his twitter account, the legislator becomes Pierre Delecto..

He's in good company. Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay wrote the Federalist Papers under the collective "Publius." "Lewis Carroll" was actually Charles Lutwidge Dodgson. (Dodgson was apparently embarrassed for writing kids' stuff.) Mary Ann Evans wrote under the name "George Eliot," figuring, no doubt correctly, that her stuff would gain wider circulation if folks thought a man wrote it. We all think the author of *Gulliver's Travels* was Jonathan Swift, but his real name was Lemuel Gulliver.

Even Stephen King has resorted to a nom de plume, Richard Bachman. His publishers feared that folks would figure the sheer combined output of King/Bachman must be junk.

I know some of you snobs are saying, "Well .....?" But King by that or any other name has actually written some fine stuff.

## Whatever gets you through the night

Joie Henney, 65, has an emotional support alligator named Wally. I'm sure Wally isn't as supportive as my support wallaby, Wilbur.

## But they make it up in volume?

It costs the U.S. mint 2.06 cents to make a penny.

## All-time worst case of littering

NASA launched the Skylab in 1973. It lasted six years before falling back to earth. When pieces fell in the Shire of Esperance, near Perth in southwestern Australia, the Shire fined the United States 400 Australian dollars for littering. The fine remained unpaid for 30 years, until a radio host named Scott Barley raised the funds from his morning show listeners.

## The Last Words



## Extra

### Innings #110

"The writer's home companion"

The Fall of 2019

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