

A word from our president

BY DICK SIMPSON

By vote of the Midland Authors Board, we postponed our April program until October and have canceled our annual awards banquet on May 12. Being over 100 years old, we have been here before when we had to cancel our annual meetings in 1918 and some war years. Like then, we will emerge again after the pandemic has run its course.

Our plan is to announce this year's awards for best book in a variety of categories on May 11.



Dick Simpson

Then at Lit Fest (previously the Printer's Row Book Fair), which has moved its dates to Sept. 5-6, we will have a festive reception for the winners and members. It will, hopefully, be a

celebration of the endurance and excellence of Midwestern literature, outstanding books and authors, and the end of the pandemic. We will send finalized plans over the summer.

Midland Authors has had a number of major achievements this year: a revised web site, a beautiful new brochure, and, of course, wonderful programs showcasing our members and authors.

The election of new officers and board members will be held at the September Lit Fest reception. If you have nominations or wish to volunteer, please contact the nominating committee chairman, **Dominic Pacyga**, at dpacyga@colum.edu.

Finally, rest assured that we are a strong, vital organization with 325 members and a sound treasury. We will be back in full force when we no longer have to stay at home. Until then, be safe. And keep writing. We can and will change the world.



Lin Enger



John Wasik



Joyce Burns Zeiss



Patrick Reardon

Coronavirus reflections:

'Writing has become my solace, as it always was'

While hoping everyone is well and is staying safe, *Literary License*, as it did last month, is turning to authors to tell us how they are moving forward on their book projects amid the COVID-19 social distancing and widespread suffering and grief. Here is what they say:

Lin J. Enger: I wish everyone at the Midland Authors good health in this surreal world. If I had advice for making the best use of this time, I'd send it – but at this point, I'm just trying to adapt. I can report that my new novel, *American Gospel*, is scheduled to be published this fall by the University of Minnesota Press. Holding my breath that by then we'll be moving back toward some kind of normal.

John Wasik: In a nutshell, I'm writing as much as possible, punctuated by walks employing the proper social distancing. I

had projected to finish a book manuscript (for my next book *Lincolnomics*) by July. Now it looks like I'll have a first draft in April. Ironically, it's a good time for being inside and writing. To all my fellow writers (and everyone else), be well – and be safe.

Joyce Burns Zeiss: I am finding more time to work on my novel. My writing groups have gone online, including Off Campus Writers Workshop, which anyone can sign into for a small fee. I am also keeping a journal of this time. Writing has become my solace, as it always was.

Patrick Reardon: I've been coping with this new normal by writing a lot of essays about the experience – one in the Sun-Times, one in the Tribune, one on my Pump Don't Work blog and four in the online journal Third Coast Review. I'm supposed to get the copy-edited manu-

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Wyatt Townley



Christoph Irscher



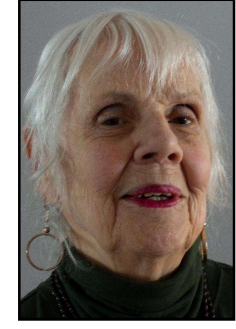
Whitney Scott



Robert Marovich



Kate Hannigan



Helen Lambin

■ Solace Continued from Page 1

script from Southern Illinois University Press for my Loop book at the beginning of May, so I'm expecting to spend much of that month focused on that.

I've also found myself doing a lot of reading and gathering research online and from my own library of Chicago books for what could end up being a future book about Chicago. The idea for the book is, at this point, so amorphous and open-ended that I can graze through what research I'm able to do and I'm not hampered by an inability to do outside research.

Wyatt Townley: First things first. One gift of a crisis is in discovering what's important – and what isn't. For us, its love and art – the rest just sloughs away. Oh yeah, and coffee. Okay, wine. We could do pretty well on coffee and wine, but chewing is important. So in descending order: love, art, coffee, wine and food. And toilet paper.

It's a funny thing. Everybody talks about how much time they suddenly have. It seems to me that these people are not writers. Book projects are sidelined while we're preoccupied with learning to get our little lives online. Today, I succeeded in getting my yoga class gathered for a Zoom orientation – and my computer crashed.

So, patience. That's another gift of crisis – and one of my biggest weaknesses.

Christoph Irscher: In my teaching life, I have transitioned fully to virtual teaching. Precisely because I spend so much time in front of screens, I have, in my writing life, gone back to writing out drafts in longhand, in notebooks or on notepads. And I have started consulting actual reference works on my shelves again, dictionaries, encyclopedias, history books, rather than running internet

searches.

It's a real pleasure, long forgotten, although it doesn't, of course, mitigate my acute and constant sense of grief and concern for all the suffering that is going on. Also, my daily walks and bike rides have become ever more important to me.

Kate Hannigan: I do better with a routine, so I'm trying to push myself to write for a chunk of hours each weekday, think about new projects on weekends, and in the other hours immerse myself in audio-

“ While I do believe that writing is what keeps me sane, I've made time to take two walks each day. ”

books, ebooks and paper books. And while I do believe that writing is what keeps me sane, I've made time to take two walks each day. For the month of April, I've set a goal of trying to walk six miles per day. It's a little random, but so is the universe right now.

David Radavich: If one can mentally quarantine the suffering and dying caused by the coronavirus, in certain respects the isolation is a writer's dream.

I have written some eight poems thus far on different aspects and moods of the pandemic, and I've also had time to read books long since collecting dust on my shelves, classic and new works alike. Of course, home improvement chores nag for attention, but reaching out electronically has taken on new urgency and dimension.

Helen Lambin: At the beginning of the quarantine, I felt that the challenge of adapting was enough, without trying to

write. Except that my writing is generally about difficult transitions, and I tend to write my best when I'm upset, sad or aggravated. And in spite of my decision not to write, I found myself grabbing a dilapidated notebook and making notes about a current concern non-quarantine related, to add to a work I thought was already finished, and then. ... Well, the hard copy is in a notebook in the closet, waiting. Writing is one of my ways of coping, so there you are.

Robert Marovich: For me, as a grant writer and a historian, I'm used to working from home. I've been using the stay-at-home time to accelerate my editing of two manuscripts due this spring and my work on on two articles for potential publication later this year. It's a way to make the best of what is a very challenging time.

Whitney Scott: I have reviewed audio books for the American Library Association's Booklist Magazine for 25 years, and deadlines have now been loosened up, but the larger change I'm experiencing is the need to receive books only via download to my computer.

Former Midland Authors President Joanne Koch: Though the next production of my musical "Belle Barth: If I embarrass you, tell your friends" (music by Ilya Levinson, lyrics by Owen Kalt, book by Joanne Koch) has been postponed, I've been able to use some of my time sheltering at home to complete with collaborator **Fern Schumer Chapman** our stage adaptation of Fern's acclaimed nonfiction book *Motherland*.

The stage play "Motherland" will receive its first staged reading in September as part of the Chicago Writers' Bloc New Play Festival at the Piven Theater in Evanston. As director of the Writers' Bloc, working with outstanding area playwrights for the past 25 years,

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I've helped to bring over 250 new plays to Chicago area audiences. Many of these plays have gone on to productions across the country, including off Broadway. Fern and I join area playwrights and authors, hoping that we all will be seeing our work in print and on stages by the time September rolls around.



Joanne Koch

Monday night, May 11 at 7 p.m. on Zoom. Please email info@writers-blocfest.org and consider submitting a scene (three to five pages) to be read from your play with a brief synopsis. We still have a few slots open for the September festival of staged readings

Warm regards to the Midland Authors.

Jarice Hanson: One issue I have, is that while working with McGraw-Hill on an academic project, the contract that I was expecting was held up while the company was going through restructuring. At this point, I don't know when, if at all,



Jarice Hanson

that contract may come through, and if so, what that means to the deadlines that were already agreed upon. As a result, I'm putting a halt to that project for now and working on a series of essays that are being run online in a regional publication called *The Berkshire Edge*. I retain copyright, and those essays will undoubtedly work their way into other writing projects in the future.

Cyndee Schaffer: March (Women's History Month) is always a very busy month for me with my presentations about *The Journey to Mollie's War*, my mother's story as a WAC (Women's Army Corps) who served in Europe in WWII. But due to the coronavirus, everything



Cyndee Schaffer

Organization for Women asked me to do a Zoom presentation of *The Journey to Mollie's War* for their April 22 meeting. I look forward to figuring out how to use this technology to share my PowerPoint and videos – definitely a learning experience.

Gary W. Moore (in a tweet): Quarantine is what we make of it.

Amelia Cotter (See *Literary Latest* for details about her latest book, *This House: The True Story of a Girl and a Ghost*, Page 10): My next projects are a third edition of my children's book *Breakfast with Bigfoot*, also from Haunted Road Media, and after that, a long-awaited poetry collection called *apparitions* that is currently longlisted with Rhythm & Bones Press. I am preparing for next steps as I would otherwise, without a world-wide pandemic. It helps me stay grounded



Amelia Cotter

and gives me something to look forward to, and to look forward to sharing with the world when we come out on the other side of this. I have also been doing "Spooky Story Tuesdays" on Facebook Live from my personal page once a week, where I read or tell classic scary stories for kids and adults by candlelight, and I had one viewer comment that he and his wife tuned in but then they got in bed and just listened. And that his wife said to him, "This must be what life was like when people would gather around the radio at night." I think many people are turning to books and stories right now, and even creativity in the sense that there is this trend at the moment of people baking homemade bread. I hope these trends continues beyond all of this, and that other authors' delayed plans or projects will come to fruition with much success.

has changed. Six of my presentations in March and all of my April presentations were canceled. Someone from the North/Northwest Suburban Chicago Chapter National

SMA member 90% sure he had coronavirus

On his blog, *The Truncheon*, Midland Authors member Patrick McBriarty writes he started coming down with a probable case of COVID-19 on March 16.

"This heavy fatigue was characterized by an inability to concentrate, difficulty doing much work, (even reading

for more than an hour or two became a struggle) low energy, desire to lie down (rather than sit up or stand) and overall tiredness and not feeling well," wrote McBriarty, who fortunately has since mostly recovered.

Also, Midland Authors Corresponding Secretary **Gerard Plecki** tested positive for COVID-19, and is recovering.

The Midland Authors wishes every member who has touched by the virus a speedy and full recovery.



Patrick McBriarty

John Hallwas: I now write on both implications of the coronavirus epidemic as well as my usual subject of Illinois-Midwestern history and authors. "Our Loneliness Epidemic" deals with the inner (or psychological) implications of the pandemic, which writers may want to be prompted to think about.

Burt Levy (from his newsletter): Driving your spouse/significant other nuts?

Trust me: she (or he) feels the same way. Good time to keep firearms, sharp objects and blunt instruments under lock and key.

Getting out of your pajamas for at least a few hours each day?

Shaving at regular (or even irregular) intervals?

Risking the occasional trip to market?

Watching way too much daytime TV?

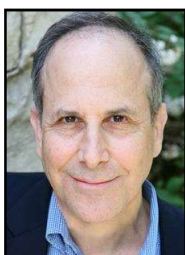
Read a book, for gosh sakes. Preferably one of mine.

Biblio File

Note: Rescheduled program: *The Midland Authors April 14 program has rescheduled to the fall. See Literary License and midlandauthors.com for updates.*

Another note: *Because of Illinois' stay-at-home order and earlier social distancing policy, our trips to the post office box have been limited. If we have not responded to something you mailed in, please contact tomfrisbie@aol.com.*

Carl Smith has a new book coming out: *Chicago's Great Fire: The Destruction and Resurrection of an Iconic American City*. It is scheduled to be published by Atlantic Monthly Press on Oct. 6, two days before the 149th anniversary of the fire. The paperback is scheduled for a year later. ... **Michael Fedo's** 1979 book was the subject of a front-page story in a March



Carl Smith

30 Duluth News Tribune story with the headline "Author of 'The Lynchings in Duluth' broke silence on city's dark history." The story, citing the Minnesota Historical Society Press, says *The Lynchings in Duluth* is still used in high school and college courses. ... **James Finn Garner's** short story "Final Transmission" was published in *Ahoy*



James Finn Garner

Comics' series, *Dragonfly & Dragonflyman*. ... **David L. Harrison** writes to say: "KOLR10-TV, the Springfield, Missouri, CBS affiliate station, is making my books available to kids via their online site. The first four books appeared on March 25 and new ones were scheduled to come in the next few days. Some of the dozen books I chose for them are oldies but, of course, I also included (with appropriate requirements) the newer titles. I'm not sure when or if the station will expand to include books by other authors, but for now I have the whole thing to myself. The station reaches across southwest

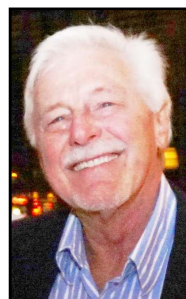
“Gotta exercise the writing muscles daily.”

Missouri and into parts of Kansas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas. Recently, I listened to one of the recordings on my cell phone, which was fun." ... In March, **David Blight** received the American Academy of Arts and Letters' Gold Medal for History award, given for eminence in an entire body of work. ... **Wyatt Townley** tells Biblio File, "Delighted to report I was commissioned to write a poem for *Scientific American's* December issue. It's on the Hubble Deep Field, December being the 25th anniversary of its discovery by astronomer Bob Williams. And a poem the Johnson County Library (Kansas) commissioned me to write on the value of books is being set in steel and dedicated this fall at their writers conference. Meanwhile, I'm (mostly not) working on my next book of poems, *The Country in the Mirror*. ...

Claude Walker writes to say, "Gotta exercise the writing muscles daily, so I'm catching up on a backlog of TripAdvisor reviews. (I'm at 315 reviews with 210,000 'reads.')

 And the Sun-Times ran my Letter-to-Ed ('Thompson Center is a gem – preserve it'). In November, I had a booth at the Miami Book Fair to hawk *Drone Dogs* and *Seminole Smoke*, and ran into fellow SMA-er **Alex Kotlowitz!**

The Miami Book Fair is smaller than Printers' Row Lit Fest, more ethnically diverse, gritty. I did three media interviews and had brisk sales but that was pre-virus. I fear for this year's Lit Fest. Two projects in my pipeline. A five-year-old manuscript, *Red Line Rumble*, is set on a subway car on the eve of Y2K. And *Paddling the Pinellas Peninsula* will chronicle my 120-mile kayak circumnavigation of Pinellas County, Florida. (I'm halfway there.) My "Bicentennial-by-Buttons" exhibit still draws eyeballs to my website." ... **Mary Barr** has received a fellowship through the Awards for



Claude Walter

Faculty Program from the National Endowment for the Humanities. She will use the award to complete her second book examining the history of residential segregation and the struggle for open housing in suburbs north of Chicago from 1853 to the present. This was a highly competitive funding cycle; NEH funded 11% of its fellowships proposals that it received. ... **Dan Dinello** recently published two articles on Juan Cole's Informed Comment Website: "Trump Spreads the Germs of Racial Hatred and Xenophobia" and "A Malignant Contagion: Trumpism's Mindlessness on Coronavirus and Albert Camus' *The Plague*."

... **Aaron Coleman's** "Another Strange Land: Downpour off Cape Hatteras (March, 1864)" was the Academy of American Poets' selection for its Poem-a-Day for March 24. ... On April 15, **Robert Fieseler's** debut book *Tinderbox: The Untold Story of the Up Stairs Lounge Fire and the Rise of Gay Liberation* won the Louisiana Literary Award. Robert writes, "[It's] an honor given to one book per year by the Louisiana Library Association and awarded last year to my hero Ernest J. Gaines! ... It's the first time in LLA history that they've honored an explicitly queer book."



Aaron Coleman

... The April 12 New York Times Book Review wrote of past Midland Authors book award winner **Kate DiCamillo**: "Kate DiCamillo writes books for children. We should all be reading them." ... **Dennis Byrne** writes to say, "Enjoyed **Ann Durbin Keating's** thoughts on visiting the historical sites [April 2020 Literary License]. I tried to do so with my 1812 book: From the site of the Fort Dearborn massacre to Mackinac; Lewiston, New York; Toronto; Fort Henry; Bladensburg, Maryland; Queenston Heights, Canada, Alexandria, Virginia, and, of course, Washington D.C. Obviously, nothing is left at a few of these. In Bladensburg, for example, I walked through a neighborhood of homes, imagining the various battle lines up the hill. A wonderful experience." ... **Barb**

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'That seemed noble to me'

This is Part 38 of the history of the Society.

I don't think poems have messages, exactly. They are experiences. And they dramatize experience," poet **Edward Hirsch** told an audience of about 100 at a Midland Authors meeting on April 16, 2013, at the Cliff Dwellers. So why did he decide to become a poet? "You could take the muck and mire of your own life. You could take the messy things in your own life, the difficult experiences that you didn't understand and try to turn them into something," he said. "... If you turned them into something that you thought was beautiful, that seemed noble to me. I aspired to that. And I thought this is a way to spend your life, to try to take your experiences and transform them into something that will stand apart from you. That will try to live alone when you are not there to explain it."

"A tradition of the Midwest is that everyday people are really connected to literature," poet **Marc Kelly Smith**, founder of the Uptown Poetry Slam, said when he emceed the SMA awards dinner on May 14, 2013, at the Holiday Inn. "In the Midwest, we write about our place – it's not high-falutin', it's really down to Earth."

Accepting the adult nonfiction award that evening for his book *You Were Never in Chicago*, **Neil Steinberg** commented: "The genius of Chicago is ... there is something here for everyone. If am I proud of one thing in this book, I didn't say this is the best Chicago, or this is the true Chicago or this is the only Chicago. I said this is my Chicago. You are allowed to go out and find your Chicagos, and you can live these wonderful lives here and find the things that you think are interesting."

"I've always known that ... poetry could solve, could heal, could bring truth and respire where some other methods couldn't," said **Roger Bonair-Agard**, as he accepted the Midland Authors' poetry award for his book *Bury My Clothes* on May 13, 2014, at the Cliff Dwellers.



Stuart Dybek

"For me, including descriptions of weather is the making of mood," **Stuart Dybek** said at an SMA meeting on Nov. 11, 2014, at the Cliff Dwellers. "The writers I've been very attracted to in the 20th century have frequently been writers who hung on to that whole notion of mood. ... There are just so many great writers of place. You



Literary Lore
Robert Loerzel

think of all the great writers Chicago is known for. How do you evoke an urban landscape beyond the names of the streets? A lot of it is just evoking the urban landscape. It could be any city with some of the descriptions. That fact that you have already called it Chicago and given it Chicago street names now has that kind of an effect where the reader is participating. ... You don't put weather in a piece unless the weather is what T.S. Eliot in a very academic term called the objective correlative. ... What Eliot says is the way a writer writes is you don't say, 'I am so lonely.' You make loneliness. And the way you make loneliness is you find an object that correlates to loneliness and you create that object."

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Rosenstock was among the children's authors who participated in Stimola Literary Studio's March 23-April 3 live streams for children. ... **Blue Balliett** told the Barnstable (Massachusetts) Patriot if there is a silver lining to social distancing it is that it is an excuse to read more. She is reading *The Museum of Contemporary Things* by Alice Hoffman. ...



Blue Balliett

Christoph Irmscher recently reviewed Adam Hochschild's *Rebel Cinderella: From Rags to Riches to Radical, the Epic Journey of Rose Pastor Stokes* for the Wall Street Journal. And his co-authored book (with Cooper Graham) *Love and Loss in Hollywood: Florence Deshon, Max Eastman, and Charlie Chaplin*, a biography-in-letters of the Hollywood actress Florence Deshon and her relationship with both Chaplin and socialist writer Max Eastman, is

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P.O. Box 10419, Chicago IL 60610

Editor: Thomas Frisbie
tomfrisbie@aol.com

Copy Editor: Beverly Offen
www.midlandauthors.com

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Society of Midland Authors members can now pay their membership dues, buy tickets to the annual dinner and make donations on our website with PayPal (there is a \$1 fee to help cover PayPal's fee). To make a donation, visit our home page at www.midlandauthors.com and click on the "Donate" button in the upper right corner.

Printers Row book fair postponed until Sept.

This year's Printers Row Lit Fest, originally scheduled for June 6 and 7 in the South Loop has been rescheduled to Sept. 5 to Sept. 6.

Printers Row said: "We have selected Sept. 5 and 6 as our new dates for the festival. Pushing back to September allows us to take advantage of the good summer weather in Chicago (average highs are similar to June!) and low average rainfall (great for books!). Pushing back will allow us all time to assess needs and abilities, and our hope is that we will be able to use this postponement to lock in our programming that is now in a certain amount of flux due to the fluid nature of travel plans that we are experiencing. In short, we are confident that this postponement will

deliver a better experience to us ALL than moving forward with our June dates."

The Midland Authors will have tent spaces available for members. Plastic tarps will be available if it rains.

To sign up for a two-hour slot or to make revisions in your plans due to the postponement, contact Joseph Gustaitis at jagustaitis@yahoo.com.

The fee is \$30 (the 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. slot is half-price, at \$15.) The other time slots are 10 a.m. to noon, noon to 2 p.m. and 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. Authors who sign up for a time slot can sell their books during that time. Authors are responsible for transporting their books to and from the tent.

The SMA has been at Printers Row since **Richard Lindberg** and **Carol**

Carlson started the tradition in 2000, as, Lindberg said, "a means of showcasing and promoting the aims of the Society and the fine work of our author members for a nominal fee – far less than what individuals might otherwise pay were they to reserve a table on their own."

Authors should prepare for gusts of wind and not be surprised if it rains.

Authors can pay for their time slot by sending \$30 to our post office box at Society of Midland Authors, P.O. Box 10419, Chicago 60610. Or they can visit our website at www.midlandauthors.com and pay via PayPal, with a \$1 service fee. Authors who have paid for the June dates but can't make September will be reimbursed.

Biblio File

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coming out from Indiana University Press in December. ... **Flint Taylor** spoke on April 13 about the Marcus Smith case and the Greensboro police on the WBAI radio show "Law and Disorder." ... **Rich Cahan** wrote "Thanks, Jim, for 33 years of calls to the kids from Santa on Christmas Eve" for the April 16 Chicago Sun-Times. ... **David Quammen** talked on March 28 on NPR about his research into animal-to-human transmission of viruses. ... Midland Authors Vice President **Marlene Targ Brill** posted on Facebook on April 12: "Stay safe; stay strong; and read!" ... **Scott Turow** wrote "There's no better time to bring back the pocket handkerchief" for the April 15 Washington Post. ... **Ann Durkin Keating** had an online video discussion about the life of early Chicago historian Juliette Kinzie April 14 with Brad Hunt, the Newberry Library's president for research and academic programs. Ann tells Biblio File, "It was great fun – around 40 minutes and had over 225 attendees!" ... The March 31 Washington Post detailed how the coronavirus has added to the financial challenges for



Rich Cahan

Midland Authors' award winner **Art Cullen's** Storm Lake (Iowa) Times newspaper, where Cullen won a Pulitzer Prize.

... **Jeremy T. Wilson's** short story "Lessy" was selected for the *2020 Best Small Fiction Anthology*. ... **Keir Graff** tweets to say, "I know lots of people like to say that books don't get proper editing anymore, but I just turned in my second-pass proofs for *The Tiny Mansion*, and I am unbelievably grateful for the laser-like attention of @penquinkids editors, copyeditors, proofreaders."

... Author Suzanne Park was quoted on April 7 saying **Gloria Chao** is one of her "go-to authors." ... **Raymond Benson** reviewed the new Blu-ray release of Harold Becker's "Malice" (1993). ... **Jim Daniels** co-edited *Respect: The Poetry of Detroit Music* (Michigan State University Press, Dec 1, 2019). ... **Jerry Apps** wrote "Garden nourishes the soul in troubled times" for the April 13 Wisconsin State Farmer. ... **Eldon Ham** was interviewed by Dane Placko about the cancellation of sports events and on March 12 Fox32 Chicago featured a short clip from that interview. Also, Eldon was scheduled to be interviewed April 20 along with his lawyer-daughter Carla by Garry Lee Wright (formerly of WGN Radio) on



Gloria Chao

Wright's home radio network show "Pandemic Pirate Radio." Eldon writes to say, "Friday the 13th was my last day in the office, and it seems like a long time ago that I began the whole shelter in place thing." ... The April 10 Newcity Chicago quoted from **Greg Borzo's** *Lost Restaurants of Chicago*. ... **Harry Mark Petrakis** wrote "Years later, regretting an impatient, unfeeling question" for the March 13 Chicago Sun-Times. ... **Jarice Hanson** wrote "Living Through History: Thinking About the Meaning of Time" for the April 15 Berkshire (Massachusetts) Edge. ... The April 16 Chicago Tribune referred to **Jeannie Morris' Brian Piccolo: A Short Season** as an "excellent" book involving Chicago and sports. The article also cited **Jonathan Eig's** *Ali: A Life* and **Ring Lardner's** *You Know Me, Al* among its "20 Chicago sports books to read during your quarantine." Also, on April 14, Channel 2 CBS Chicago quoted from a 1984 interview Jeannie did with the late Cubs former manager Jim Frey. ... **John Hallwas** was quoted in the McDonough County (Illinois) Voice on March 30. ... The March 24 Columbus (Ohio) Parent called **April Pulley Sayre's** *Bloom Boom!* a "beautiful nonfiction picture book."



John Hallwas

Trying not to be ‘bum of the art world’

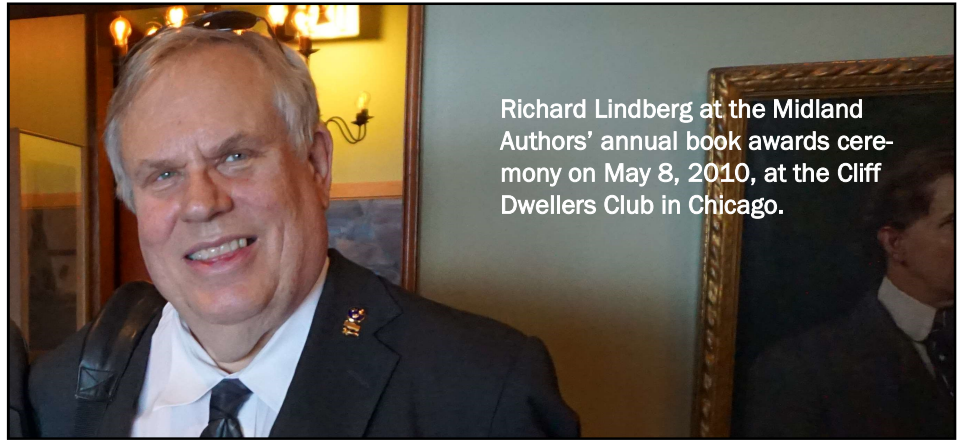
This is the ninth part of a series reflecting on writing.

My experiences at Lerner and my history degree from Northeastern were of little interest to the editors at the Sun Times, Tribune and Daily News where I had dutifully sent my resumes; enough resumes to wall paper the entire wall of the city room. They did not know me.

I never attended the Medill School of Journalism (could not afford to) or had a famous uncle, a mentor, or a “connected” father to sponsor me into a rewarding editorial job at a foundation, a museum, a publisher, a magazine or a newspaper. While writing for Lerner in 1978, my first published book, a curious little paperback titled *Stuck on the Sox* came out, only to be panned by Clarence Peterson, a reviewer for the Tribune. It was one of the lowest points of my life.

I understood at an early age that the reality of earning a living trumps literary ambition. There seemed to be little chance of securing a rewarding career in publishing and journalism. I was only 24. But it was the mid-1970s, and America was mired in the worst economic recession since the Great Depression. I was ready to give it all up. I knew I could never quit the day job to become what one sharp-eyed wag who had known enough unemployed poets, painters, musicians, actors and writers refusing to accept honest work in any other field of endeavor unrelated to their talent, to term a “bum of the art world.”

I would not put myself in the position of living off of others. I would try to move up in the world as best as I could and advance myself professionally. I completed 13 years of service with Sears in 1984 and began anew writing scripts for telemarketers at the Signature Group, a now defunct marketing firm peddling memberships over the phone for the Montgomery Ward Auto Club. It was my first-full time writing gig, a step up to corporate America. I thought of it as my



Richard Lindberg at the Midland Authors' annual book awards ceremony on May 8, 2010, at the Cliff Dwellers Club in Chicago.

escape from the boredom of retail, and a leap into the white collar world; maybe even a chance to become someone of importance. From my little office I observed a passing parade of BMW-driving Yuppies in three-piece suits, women with big hair and shoulder pads battling one another for promotions and advancement. In the business argot of the 1980s

everyone “pushed the envelope” on one thing or another.

It turned out to be a really crummy post-1970s recession Reagan-era malaise job, peddling auto club membership, credit card protection and other worthless,

unwanted services to Ward’s customers who were about to see their cherished old department store boarded up. Signature was swallowed up and dissolved a few years later.

Next, I answered a blind ad in the newspaper and was hired for a writing job that sounded so very promising. I landed with a small north suburban publisher producing a crime encyclopedia. It was a real writing job and at last a genuine opportunity to pursue my life’s calling. I gave it everything I had. I churned out voluminous amounts of copy in a short time. I enjoyed the frenetic, fast-paced writing, the irreverence of my desk mates and the genteel Wilmette setting. I didn’t make much money in those days but found my calling penning true crime stories. The old trees and the stately homes lining leafy streets – a far cry from the

cold sterility of the impersonal world of telemarketing in Schaumburg, Downers Grove and the I-88 and I-90 corridors – it provided a picturesque backdrop to write, reflect and research.

I hoped that the tide had finally risen for me and this would be just the start of my budding editorial career. The publisher accorded me a degree of professional respect as a fellow well traveled author and I had hoped it would become a long lasting and profitable association. It did not.

The staff and the publisher managed to beat the editorial deadline and deliver the six-volume desk top set to critical acclaim. However the seed money for the operation ran out and nearly all of the full-time writers had to be let go immediately. I stayed on, and I agreed to work without salary for a period of months in the mistaken hope that the company could be resuscitated with new projects. I lived off of my wife’s paycheck (with great shame) and my dwindling savings until I could no longer survive without steady take-home pay. I feared that I was fast becoming the dreaded “bum of the art world.”

My anxiety was unending. I barely had enough money to properly bury my mother following her death in March 1993, nor did I ever recover the months of unpaid salary that was due me.

Richard Lindberg's forthcoming books are a village history of suburban Addison, Illinois, and Tales of Forgotten Chicago, which relates stories roughly from the time of the Civil War to the 1960s and is due out with Southern Illinois University Press this year.

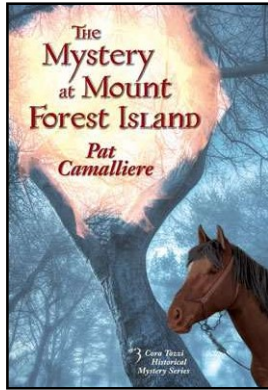
Literary Life

Richard Lindberg





Literary Latest



FICTION SET IN A REAL PLACE

Pat Camalliere's *The Mystery at Mount Forest Island* (Amika Press, March 27, 2020) is a tale of crime, deceit, love and the value of friendship set in the forests of Lemont, Illinois, in suburban Chicago.

The book is part of Camalliere's Cora Tozzi Historical Mystery Series.

Camalliere tells Literary License, "My first two books were historical mysteries set in the forests near Lemont, and I wanted to continue those components. I had long been fascinated by an area in the forest preserves of Cook County where once a golf course existed, said to have been played during Prohibition by Al

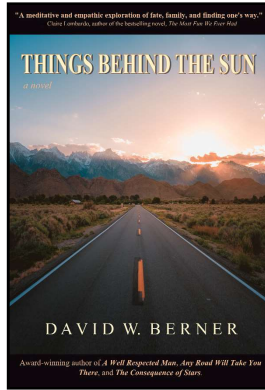


Pat Camalliere

Capone. The course was closed in the 1940s when the Manhattan Project was moved adjacent to it.

"During my high school years I had an Italian friend who faced challenges bravely. Rather than telling two separate stories, I decided to use the location and dramatize the friend's experiences in a single story.

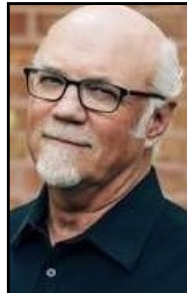
"The book is fiction, but it is based on a real place, and some real people and situations are included in a fictional way."



FOLLOW-UP NOVEL

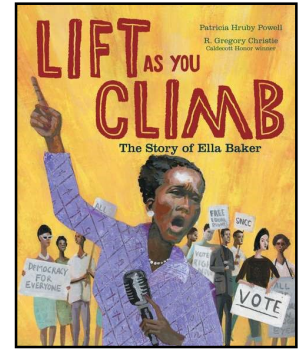
David W. Berner writes to say, "I have a novel coming in April from Adelaide Books. *Things Behind the Sun* (Adelaide Books, March 16, 2020) is a follow-up to my novel *A Well-Respected Man*, which was honored by the Midland Authors in 2019.

"My new book's original release was to be at the Book Expo America and Book Con in New York City in late May. But with the postponements, the publisher quickly shifted gears, racing to get it out early, hoping to meet the demand of the mini-surge of book buying and reading during social-distancing. Such an odd place to be. Such an odd adjustment. With all this, *Things Behind the Sun* will now have a virtual book launch on



David W. Berner

Facebook Live. We will be cross-posting the event with the Facebook pages of The Book Cellar in Chicago's Lincoln Square and Adelaide Books, New York. It will also be live on Instagram and will have a Facebook Live Launch. I believe I'm fairly skilled with technology, but this idea of a launch on simultaneous platforms is brand-new. It will be an adventure, and I am hoping a rather positive experience in these tough times."



GREAT WOMAN

Lift As You Climb: The Story of Ella Baker (Simon & Schuster /McElderry, 2020, illustrated by R. Gregory Christie) by **Patricia Hruby Powell** is about the civil rights worker Ella Baker, a contemporary of Dr. Martin Luther King, but older than King.

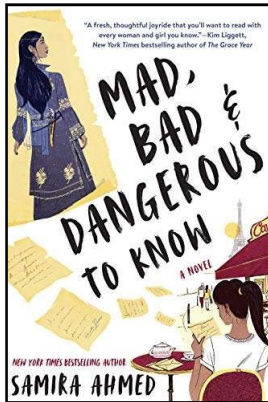
Here is what Powell tells us about her new book: "Dr. King and Ella did not always see eye to eye. Ella once said to Dr. King something along the lines of, 'I don't think you can run a movement based on one charismatic personality.' What happens when you're gone? And he is supposed to have replied, 'This is what I can do.' They had huge respect for each other.

"I hadn't known about Ella Baker at the time my friend Shelley Masar informed me about this great woman. In fact Shelley named one of her children after Ella. When I started researching, I was immediately drawn to Ella Baker's life and work. My parents worked to right social injustice, so following in their footsteps was obvious, and writing books is one way to help right wrongs. I'm attracted to people who do good. The Civil Rights Movement was such an important era in our history, and as Ella Baker said (and is the last line in my book), "The struggle for rights didn't start yesterday and has to continue until it is won."

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Literary Latest

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FIGHTING TO WRITE OWN STORIES

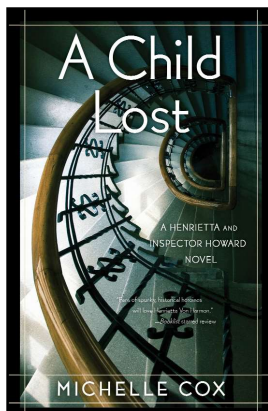
Samira Ahmed, the 2019 Midland Authors Children's Fiction Award winner, has a new book out, *Mad, Bad & Dangerous to Know* (Soho Teen, April 7, 2020).

From the publisher:

"Told in alternating narratives that bridge centuries, the latest novel from New York Times best-selling author Samira Ahmed traces the lives of two young women fighting to write their own stories and escape the pressure of cultural expectations in worlds too long defined by men."



Samira Ahmed



SOLID HISTORICAL FICTION

A Child Lost (She Writes Press, April 28, 2020) is **Michelle Cox's** latest book. Here's what Cox's tells Literary License

about the book: "The Henrietta and Inspector Howard series, set against the backdrop of an era often overlooked in American history – the time between the two World Wars – weaves together the stories of the wealthy Howards and the impoverished Von Harmons, two Chicago families that have more in common than they initially think.

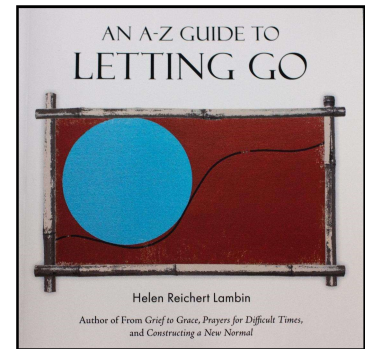
"Despite the somewhat light-hearted mysteries and the evolving romances between characters, the series is solid historical fiction, taking a closer look at some of the more pertinent issues of the day – disproportionate wealth; the plight of all women, regardless of their place in society; homosexuality; rampant crime; and the diminishing social mores of a world lost – the general crumbling away of the 'old order' in America and Europe beyond. Rich in imagery and smart, original dialogue, the series has won over 40 international awards and garnered starred reviews from both Library Journal and Booklist.

"In *A Child Lost*, Book 5 of the series, Henrietta and Clive tackle not one, but two cases: one involving a spiritualist who is holding séances in an abandoned schoolhouse on the outskirts of Winnetka, and the other leading them to the infamous Dunning Asylum in Chicago, where an epileptic child has mistakenly been admitted. Once again, the story successfully weaves together several different plot lines with a satisfying twist.

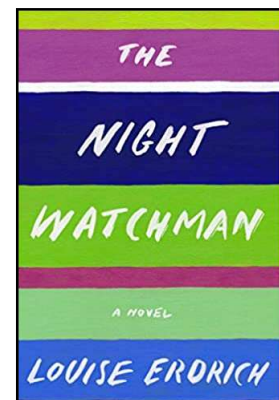
"The heroine of the series, Henrietta Von Harmon, is based on a real-life Chicago resident and was the inspiration for the novels."

DECLUTTERING OUR LIVES

Helen Lambin writes to say, "I have a new book out, with ACTA Publications. The title is: *An A-Z Guide to Letting Go* (Jan. 7, 2020). As the title suggests, the topics are alphabetized, beginning with Anxiety, passing through such topics as Carp per Diem, Envy, Letting Go of Car Keys on through Youthiness to Zeros. It includes Artwork by Chicago artist ISz.



"Part of the blurb on the back includes this, from the introduction: 'This book is, in a sense, about decluttering our lives: what to do with some things that have been important to us but are no longer. This book is more about time and space – no offense intended to Einstein. We all have only 24 allotted hours a day and so many rooms in our home. Some things have to be there, by necessity; others are there by choice; and a few are just taking up space and/or time without our truly informed consent. My previous publications include: *The Death of a Husband*, *Prayers for Difficult Times* and *Constructing a New Normal*."



'LUMINOUS EMPATHY'

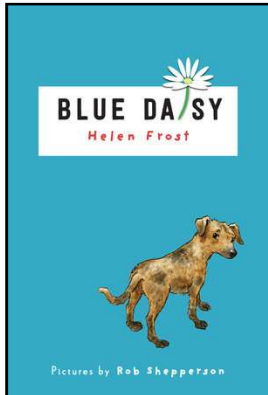
The Boston Globe wrote that **Louise Erdrich's** *The Night Watchman* (Harper, March 3, 2020) "thrills with luminous empathy."

The novel is based on Erdrich's grandfather, who worked as a night watchman and carried the fight against Native dispossession from rural North Dakota all the way to Washington, D.C. It explores themes of love and death with lightness and gravity.

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Literary Latest

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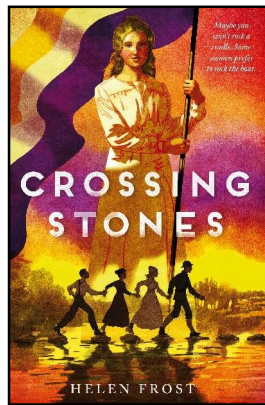
'HEARTWARMING LESSON'

Helen Frost's new book, *Blue Daisy* (Margaret Ferguson Books) is a dog-and-friendship story for ages 7-10 or so that was released on March 17. Kirkus Reviews wrote, "An easy-to-read, heartwarming lesson in trust-building."

Frost writes to say, "Since most of the celebratory events have been canceled, I'm trying to make up for that by offering signed bookplates on social media and through my favorite independent bookstores."

"*Blue Daisy* began as a picture book more than 30 years ago with a different title (*Blue Dog*). The adults were there in earlier versions, but the "mean kids" came into the story in this form (a novel-in-poems for early readers) as I dug into the motivations and feelings behind the two main characters' behavior."

This book and *Applesauce Weather* (2016) are both set in a place that reminds me of the small town in the South with an interesting assortment of



adult and child characters. Though I have lived in many places since then, that town, as it lives in my imagination, still feels like home to me.

"I have two other book releases coming up in August.

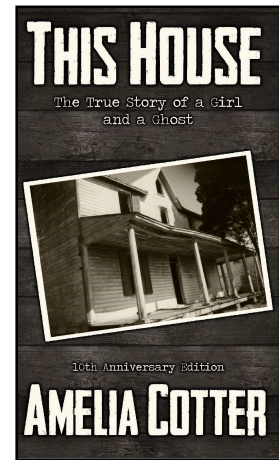
"*All He Knew* is a novel-in-poems about a boy who is deaf and mis-diagnosed as 'unteachable,' resulting in his being institutionalized. Set in 1939, it is based, loosely, on a true story, though I have given it a happier ending. Marketed for children ages 10-14, it will also be appreciated by older readers, including adults.

"A paperback edition of my novel-in-poems, *Crossing Stones*, will be released with a new cover, also in August."

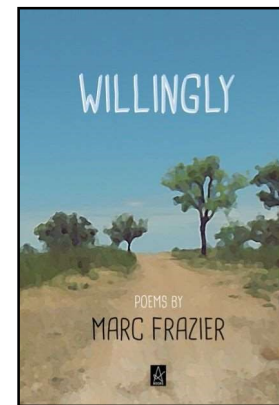
THREE BOOK RELEASES

Amelia Cotter writes to say, "I just wanted to share that last week, the 10th anniversary edition of my first book, *This House: The True Story of a Girl and a Ghost*, was released by Haunted Road Media. It is one of three (hopefully!) book releases for me this year. This was a planned spring release that happened on track and on time. I think my publisher is hoping to capitalize on what might be, for the time being, higher book and eBook sales.

"I, for one, was excited to learn that the book's release was still a go, because it's brought a sense of normal back into my routine and quieted some anxiety and restlessness. I have been working remotely for my regular job, but would have taken some time off anyway to celebrate and focus on the book's release, so in a weird way, the timing has worked out well for me. It has definitely been awkward asking people to spend their money



right now when many have uncertain financial futures, but I have also found that my friends and followers have been happy to hear some good news and to learn that some things are still operating as 'business as usual' in the world."



THIRD BOOK OF POETRY

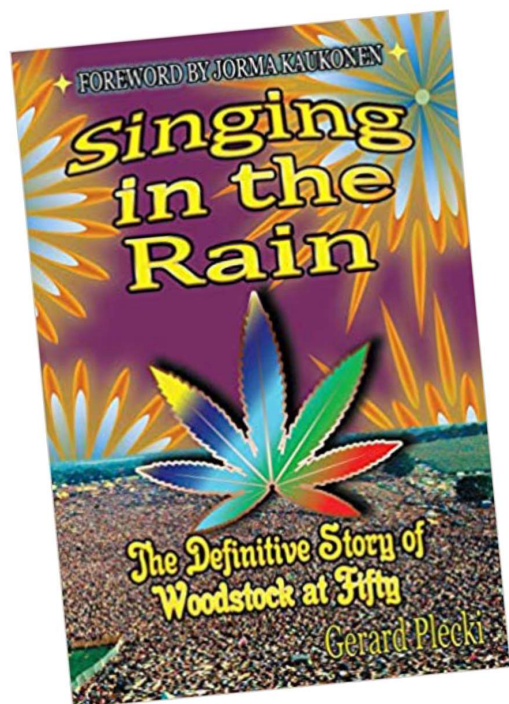
Willingly (Adelaide Books, Oct. 2019) is Marc Frazier's third book of poetry.

Frazier says, "It explores the ramifications of one's search for identity within and without the bonds of a relationship. It is centered on the many manifestations of 'narrative.' For it is always, it seems, a story we are telling no matter the form or type of poetry.

"One line demonstrates this: 'One way or another we make the stories fit.' *Willingly* explores the idea that instead of my life having been fated, it is something I've chosen willingly. It is the story of one LGBTQ individual. The epigraph to the book is also indicative of one of the major themes in the book: "We don't see things as they are. We see them as we are" (Anais Nin)."

MIDLAND AUTHORS

presents



A look back: Woodstock at 50



Tuesday, August 14, 2020

Cocktail hour: 6-7 pm; Panel discussion: 7-8 pm
at the **Cliff Dwellers Club, 200 S. Michigan Ave.**
22nd floor penthouse—with a great view of Millennium Park!

Free, open to the public; Free appetizers, cash bar

Singing in the Rain: The Definitive Story of Woodstock at Fifty, by Gerard Plecki

with a foreword by Jorma Kaukonen of the Jefferson Airplane, is an inside look at the creative energy and seminal performances that shaped this legendary event in 1969. And it's the only publication that reviews every song performed by every musician at the iconic festival.

Plecki will discuss his new book, in conversation with **Walter Podrazik**, a television historian and analyst and a lecturer at the Dept. of Communication, University of Illinois at Chicago.

“Wally” is co-author of ten books, including *Watching TV: Eight Decades of American Television*.

Plecki has written articles on music and film criticism, and his previous book, *Robert Altman*, is an authoritative analysis of this unconventional American director's films. Come hear Plecki discuss the inside story of how Woodstock came to be—and how it profoundly impacted politics, music and society.

~~~~~  
For more information, contact Greg Borzo: (312) 636-8968; gborzo@comcast.net

# Noted author will present compelling Sept. program

BY GREG BORZO

Midland Authors is organizing compelling literary events for this fall, in the hope that we'll be able to return to our regular, public, monthly meetings by then. Planned for Tuesday, Sept. 8, 2020, will be a presentation by New York Times best-selling author **Rick Perlstein** about his forthcoming book *Reaganland: America's Right Turn 1976-1980* (Simon & Schuster, Aug. 4, 2020).



**Rick Perlstein**

This event will be held at 6 p.m. at the Harold Washington Library Center, downtown Chicago, so save the date!

A Chicago resident, Perlstein wrote *The Invisible Bridge: The Fall of Nixon and*

*the Rise of Reagan; and Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America.*

Now he's updated the story with a look at the right turn that American politics took from 1976 to 1980. This book promises to be the authoritative analysis of President Ronald Reagan's first term and of the country's pulse during those difficult four years.

And it's sure to inform the current political environment at the height of yet another critical presidential election cycle.

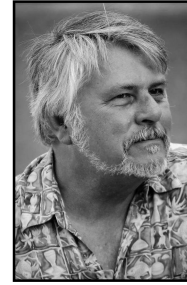
This event will be free and open to the public. Join us for an unforgettable presentation!



## New Members

**Raymond G. Ziemer's** debut novel is *The Ghost of Jamie McVay* (Black Rose Writing, 2019).

Ziemer was born and raised on the South Side of Chicago and teaches composition at the College of DuPage in Glen Ellyn, Illinois.



**Raymond G. Ziemer**

Ziemer also writes short stories and poetry, and he is active in a number of writing groups. He also contributes regularly to local journals. In addition, he has been a featured reader at literary evenings.

Of *The Ghost of Jamie McVay*, Kirkus

Reviews wrote, "A brisk, nuanced story of supernatural sightings and adolescent tribulations."

Ziemer was nominated by **Pat Camalliere**.

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