



My Writing Life

With Advice for the Beginning Writer
by Lawrence Martin

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By Lawrence Martin
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Dedication

To Eli, Iris, Maya, Asher, and Jacob

I hope one day you will read this book and be inspired to write what interests you.

Internet Links

This book contains many internet links, mainly as references for information provided. Including internet links always runs the risk of their extinction or revision long after the book is published. However, none of the internet links herein is essential to the reading of this book. In many cases a simple google search of the topic will find the reference source if the provided link no longer works. In chapters where documents from my websites are important to the topic, I have included them in one of the appendices.

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Preface – Read This First

What Genre is this Book?

The title suggests it's a memoir, which it certainly is, *in part*. But it is not a memoir in the traditional sense, i.e., one that focuses on a specific time period, reveals the author's thoughts and emotions in subjective fashion, and employs a literary writing style.

The title also suggests it's an autobiography, which it certainly is in a narrow sense, since it gives a chronologic account of one aspect of my life, writing and publishing.

So, part memoir, part autobiography, but there's more. Throughout the book I offer advice to beginning writers, emphasizing lessons learned over the years about the writing craft and self-publishing. And, to round things off, I include profiles of famous writers who had some influence on my thinking and/or writing.

I got the idea for this mixture from two great writers, Isaac Asimov and Stephen King, both of whom are profiled in this book. In Asimov's third autobiography, *I, Asimov*, he offers lots of information for writers to chew on. In King's memoir, *On Writing*, the entire second half is devoted to advice and information for the beginning writer. Throughout *My Writing Life* I interweave the two parts, memoir/autobiography and writing advice, along with advice on self-publishing – one aspect writers like King and Asimov never had to deal with.

Amazon categorizes *I, Asimov* as “author biography” and “memoir.” For *On Writing*, Amazon's genres include “fiction writing reference” and “memoir.” Multiple labels are fine, but for any writing contest, book catalog, or library inclusion, the author really has to choose one dominant genre, so the reader has some idea what kind of book it is. In final analysis, I think the best category is “autobiography.” With a lot of extras thrown in.

Suggestions for Reading *My Writing Life*

While the chapters are in chronologic order, starting with my earliest writing efforts, it is not necessary to read them in sequence. Readers looking for a bit of history about notable writers, and how they influenced my writing, can just review the chapters labeled “Profile” in the Table of Contents. For the genesis of my books, and how I got my ideas, go to the chapters with italicized book titles in the T of C. And, if you happen to have a special interest in a subject I write about, e.g., scuba diving, golf, Savannah, or music, just go to the chapters with the subject in the title. If you wish to read the book online, go to www.lakesidepress.com/MyWritingLife.pdf. For the online pdf file, click on any chapter in the Table of Contents to link directly to that chapter.

Throughout the book, 14-point **boldface font** is used to emphasize advice and comments for beginning and would-be writers. All of these items are listed in [Appendix A](#). Appendices B-E include selected items referred in the text, such as short stories, blog posts, documentary information from my websites, and music writing excerpts.

My Writing Life: Introduction

My Writing Life details my 40-year writing career, one that made me not famous, certainly not rich, and definitely not by any stretch a “great writer.” It was also not my main job. I was a pulmonary medicine physician for nearly four decades in Cleveland, and most of my early books were medical-themed. Only near retirement did I delve into fiction. My writing to date:

- Twenty published print books, another two in e-book format only, and another five published only on the internet and therefore freely available. Of these twenty-seven books, 2/3 are nonfiction, 1/3 fiction, and they encompass nine different genres
- Scripts for two unpublished plays
- Many short stories, published and unpublished
- Several writing awards conferred by Florida Writers Association
- Dozens of information-rich websites, medical and non-medical
- A monthly newsletter while in medical practice, for my hospital in Cleveland
- A monthly newsletter for my retirement community’s large writing club, spanning seven years

In addition, I’ve kept a diary over the decades that includes events, dates, and commentary about my writing efforts: details of how books and stories got rejected or accepted, ideas for new books as they first came into my head, and much trivia to remind me of events and thoughts otherwise forgotten. Compulsive as I am, the diary even includes my golf scores, which put me in the “hacker” category, and which gave me the idea for a book that I published only on the internet.

Before retirement, I never entered any writing contests. Once retired in 2015, my wife and I moved to Florida and I joined the Florida Writers Association (FWA), which has about 1400 members. Their annual writing contest, called Royal Palm Literary Awards, accepts entries in over two dozen genres, and the work can be unpublished or published. Since 2016 I have entered several stories and books and have won awards in this prestigious contest, three for novels and five for short works. Several other entries have been named “finalists” in RPLA.

While all of my writing will be discussed in some aspect, this memoir will focus mainly on the published books, which span a total of nine different genres. Writing awards notwithstanding, failures, disappointments, and frustrations will not be minimized.

Interspersed throughout the memoir are short, selective profiles of famous writers, eight of them with medical degrees.* They include authors of fiction and nonfiction, plus one well-known songwriter. Included in the list is Frank Lloyd Wright, who actually wrote twenty books, but is of course world-famous for his architecture. Each name is included to emphasize one or more points: about the mix of writing with a medical career; influence on my own writing or thinking; or, the writing craft in general.

My Writing Career should be of interest to anyone who writes and expects to publish his or her work, and also to anyone who has ever self-published a book.

My first book, a nonfiction work about lung diseases for patients, was published in 1983 by Prentice Hall, a “traditional publisher.” In the ensuing years, I wrote several medical textbooks, also traditionally-published. However, it ended up that two-thirds of my books were self-published, including all the fiction. My experience with self-publishing started years before the internet and has continued in the internet era, with Amazon’s KDP and other self-publishing platforms.

We live in The Villages, Florida, a large retirement community with about 135,000 residents at the end of 2022. There are hundreds of authors here, well over 90% self-published. To hone our craft, we can choose among a dozen or so critique clubs in which to read our work and get feedback. The one I am in now meets weekly and is called “Wannabe Writers.” Aptly named.

I have shared my self-publishing experience and advice in a PowerPoint presentation to local clubs. I title it “Self-publishing: The Good News and the Bad News.” The essence of my spiel is summarized in just two sentences.

The good news about self-publishing is that it’s easy to do.

The bad news about self-publishing is that it’s easy to do.

Why both statements are true will be explained and expounded on throughout the book.

* Edward Abbey, Isaac Asimov, Janet Asimov, Irving Berlin, Ambrose Bierce, Anton Chekhov, Agatha Christie, Robin Cook, Alan Dershowitz, Frederick Douglass, Arthur Conan Doyle, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., Stephen King, Lana Melman, Ayn Rand, Oliver Sacks, Samuel Shem, Noa Tishby, John Kennedy Toole, Harry Turtledove, Mark Twain, William Carlos Williams, Frank Lloyd Wright

Part I

Writing While in Practice

Covers of Part I Books



Isaac Asimov

As a kid, I read a lot of science fiction. The “big three” science fiction writers in the 1950s were Robert Heinlein, Arthur C. Clarke, and Isaac Asimov. Asimov was my favorite. I thought his *I, Robot* stories and three laws of robotics* were brilliant, and his early *Foundation* books mind-blowing.

Years later, I read Asimov’s massive two-volume autobiography, *In Memory Yet Green* (1979) and *In Joy Still Felt* (1980). He died in 1992, at age 72, reportedly from AIDS, a result of a blood transfusion in 1983. His writing output: 500-plus books.

While Asimov is justifiably famous as an early science-fiction writer, most of his books were nonfiction, on a huge variety of subjects: Shakespeare, the Bible, astronomy, Gilbert & Sullivan, multiple science topics, a variety of history books: *The Greeks*, *The Roman Empire*, *The Near East*, *The Egyptians* and many more. And books on humor, including his own limericks.

There is no similarity between my writing career and Asimov’s. He refused to fly and so seldom traveled, wrote for hours every day, and did not participate in physical sports. I love to travel, am not a slave to my word processor, and relish the outdoors – hiking, golf, and when younger, sailing and scuba diving (activities resulting, by the way, in three of my books). Asimov is my first author profile, because I learned two things from him.

One, you should just write whatever interests you. Single-genre writers are more likely to attract a following, but there’s nothing wrong with writing in multiple genres, if that’s where your interests take you.

Two, write clearly and simply. There are many famous writers known for a unique or complex literary style, making the reading tedious, though they may be adored by critics. Faulkner, Joyce, Melville, and Tolstoy come to mind; there are many others. But writing simply and without affectation has its merits, and *a la* Asimov, you can be both prolific and successful.

Asimov was a genius, and I will refer to aspects of his writing and his life several times in this memoir. I will also have a chapter on his second wife, Dr. Janet Asimov, who wrote science fiction for adults and children.

By the way, I do have something in common with Isaac Asimov. We both married psychiatrists.

*A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm. A robot must obey orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law. A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law.

A Brief Bio: Birth To Medical School

I was born September 12, 1943, in Savannah, Georgia, grew up there, and went to undergraduate college at the University of Georgia in Athens. So, a native Georgian. But growing up I didn't like Savannah, thought it backward, and ached for a bigger city.

My parents were raised in the lower East Side of Manhattan, and met in Savannah during the Depression. I am the middle of three brothers. In the 1950s our family made several trips to Brooklyn on vacation to visit relatives. I loved New York, a fascination that stayed with me throughout my early years. In my senior year of medical school at the University of Florida, I applied only to internships in New York.

I remember complaining to my parents about Savannah, a city they liked because it offered much easier living than their native New York. They tuned me out, and maybe that's why I turned to keeping a diary, starting in high school. The effort was sporadic, sometimes with daily entries, sometimes nothing entered for months. The diary was my first non-assigned writing, and I recall feeling some satisfaction after each entry. The diary allowed me to rant about Savannah unopposed, to diss on people who annoyed me, and to speculate about a future career. An entry from age 16 is quoted below, not a word changed.

May 4, 1960 (Junior in High school)

As of yet I have said nothing of my ambitions as a 16 year old. There are three careers which I am interested in. Science, architecture, and Journalism. I have always been interested in Science especially atomic or nuclear physics and astronomy. I used to read a lot on the atom, which knowledge I feel helped me a lot; especially getting into the Science Seminar [an elite club for high school students across the city].

Buildings, modernistic ones fascinated me, and I found I was interested in Architecture. I admire few men in this world, and Frank Lloyd Wright is one of them. His buildings are so different, so full of non conformism and reality.

I have lately become interested in journalism, partly through the course I'm taking in high school. The functions of a newspaper have always made me intrigued at how they can operate on such a tight schedule, and in some cases put out a million papers every day.

Science, Architecture, Journalism – who knows. (I may go to the moon.)

So, at age 16, I had no thought of medicine as a career. I was on the staff of our high school newspaper and wrote several bylined articles. I forgot about them until a compulsive classmate brought editions of the 1961 newspaper to our 50th high school reunion. In "Number, Please?" I showed, tongue very much in cheek, how interesting it could be to read the phone book – not too bad for a 17-year-old!

Number, Please?

By Larry Martin

Did you ever read a telephone book? For sheer enjoyment there is nothing more interesting and informative than a telephone book, and when you read three of them — well, that's real education.

Take for example the phone books of three southern cities: Savannah, Jacksonville, and Atlanta, with respective populations of approximately 150,000, 300,000, and 500,000.

Naturally, Savannah, being the smallest, has the least number of pages in its phone book — 174. Jacksonville's has 336, while Atlanta's phone subscribers occupy over 650 pages. These figures are for white and the famous "yellow" pages.

Now, you ask, what good is all this information? Well, if you're ever asked to compare the number of telephone subscribers in three cities who have the surname Smith, you won't be caught off guard. A quick reference tells you Savannah has 800, Jacksonville 1150, while the Atlanta Smiths outnumber both together with 3500 listings. What about X subscribers? Neither Savannah or Jacksonville have any, but Atlanta has one: Mrs. Nick Xigorires.

So what?, you say. Who cares?

All right, but suppose you just happen to be assigned a research paper entitled "Relative Facilities Available For Restoring Antiques in Three Southern Cities." Three looks and you see that Savannah has three, Jacksonville only two, while Atlanta has five antique restoring establishments.

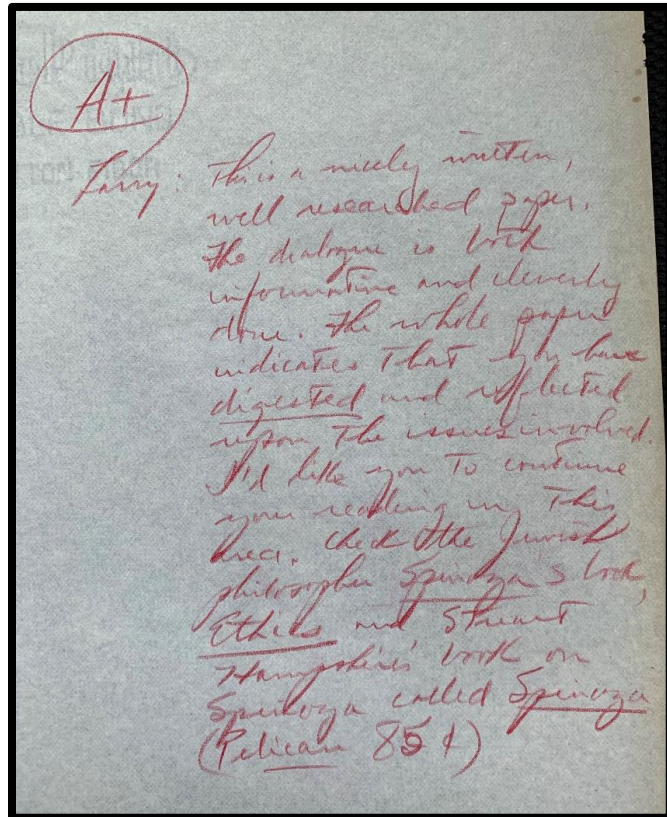
You're still not impressed. What if your closest friend happened to mention one day that the last listing in the Atlanta telephone book was Abe Zylbermine? How stupid you would feel! Stupider still if he followed it up by stating that Jack Zygmont and Ray Zoucks were last in the Jacksonville and Savannah telephone books, respectively.

You don't have to be caught in embarrassing moments of ignorance — not if you can recite such great learning. Stock up on telephone books whenever possible — they're interesting, stimulating, and full of a million and one facts.

I continued with diary entries in college and medical school, but not daily as I do now. Apart from the diary, the only writing I did before getting my M.D. degree was for assignments in college and medical school.

One undergraduate teacher, in particular, seemed impressed. Dr. Blackstone taught Introductory Philosophy, a course I took my junior year for which we had to write a review paper on some relevant topic. I chose “Determinism, Freedom, and Moral Responsibility,” and handed in twenty-five typewritten pages with numerous references. It was returned with Professor Blackstone’s handwritten note (photo).

Regarding his comment, “The dialogue is both informative and cleverly done.” I had created two characters to hash out the debate between “freewill” and “determinism,” and called them “Obfuscato” and “Lucidus.” My nice Greek names for “obfuscate” and “lucid.”



The dialog between these two characters helped explain opposing views, and also served to break up the pedantic paragraphs in the rest of the paper. It was a creative spark at age nineteen.

I aced the course and Dr. Blackstone asked if I had any interest in majoring in philosophy. At that point I was set on applying to medical school, and certainly did not see a future career in academia. Or in writing. I could write a tongue-in-cheek article in high school, or a nice term paper in college, but it never entered my mind that I could, or would, write anything more substantial. One reason, of course, is the oft-quoted advice, “write what you know.” At age nineteen, I didn’t know much.

Over the next decade education and medical training were paramount, and although I learned a great deal I certainly never thought of writing fiction.

In the summer after my first year of medical school, I stayed in Gainesville to do some basic research on mice. My mentor was Dr. A.H. Anton, a Ph.D. in pharmacology. The result was a paper we published several years later:

Martin L and Anton AH: Toxicity of acids and bases after intraperitoneal injection. Europ J Pharm 11:38-47, 1970.

I didn’t find the research very exciting, nor did I like being cooped up in a lab, with or without mice. From that point I knew my interest was in clinical medicine, not in the laboratory.

Sporadic Writing Until My First Published Story

Five of the seven years after medical school were spent in training, the first two years at Downstate Medical Center in Brooklyn (1969-1971). During my internship at Downstate I met Ruth Swimmer, a third-year medical student. Four months after our first date we married, on July 4, 1970.

The Vietnam War still raged in 1970 and I expected to be drafted before finishing my training. A better option was to join the Berry Plan, which meant I could choose the branch of service and the location for a two-year commitment. I joined the Air Force as a “flight surgeon,” basically a doctor who takes care of pilots in an outpatient clinic. I was assigned to Lackland Air Force Base, San Antonio, from July 1971 to June 1973.

Ruth did her internship at the University of Texas Medical Center. Our first child, Joanna, was born in Lackland’s Wilford Hall USAF Hospital, March 31, 1973. (The picture is from 1971, when Ruth and I attended an Air Force officer’s banquet. I am wearing the Air Force dress uniform. I had hair then.)



As a flight surgeon, I frequently wrote reports to assess if a medical condition would affect flying capacity. One report was perhaps prescient about future activity. A young pilot came to see me after he was grounded for “pineapple allergy.” I did a little research and realized there was no scientific basis for his flying restriction. I wrote a long report, explaining my medical opinion, far longer and more detailed than he or his superiors expected. Next thing we knew, his flight status was reinstated.

While in the Air Force I wrote letters on medical topics to the prestigious New England Journal of Medicine, two of which were published. Letter writing would continue in my career, culminating years later in several lengthy diatribes to two pulmonary journals, about their publication of blatantly unscientific articles on occupational lung disease. (These will be discussed in a later chapter.)

After my two years of service, we returned to New York. I finished residency training at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in The Bronx, followed by a pulmonary fellowship there. Ruth entered a psychiatry training program at New York Medical College in Valhalla, NY.

My career goal was to work in a teaching hospital, where I could both see patients and teach medical students, interns, and residents. Pulmonary physicians were in demand, and I had several job offers. The best one – not in terms of money, but in providing the position I wanted – was in

Cleveland's Mt. Sinai Medical Center, a teaching affiliate of Case Western Reserve University (CWRU) School of Medicine.

In June 1976, we drove with Joanna from New York to Cleveland and settled in a rental home. We did not have the funds to buy a house at that time. (We bought a house the following year: nine percent mortgage!) The move to Cleveland was a good choice, career-wise. Ruth was able to finish her psychiatry training at CWRU, and I happily settled into my full-time position as Chief of Mt. Sinai's Pulmonary Division, with an academic appointment at the medical school. At the time I had no thought of writing anything other than patient evaluations.

In looking back, until my first book came out in 1983 all my writing was sporadic: diary entries, medical reports, occasional letters to the editor, and one published nonfiction short story. Also, during my pulmonary fellowship after the Air Force stint, I wrote a lengthy "programmed textbook" on pulmonary physiology. This was basically a large loose-leaf note-book of questions and answers not intended for publication. It was a way to help me learn the subject and teach medical students rotating through our pulmonary ward, and a harbinger of writing to come.

In my first six years as a pulmonary specialist in Cleveland's Mt. Sinai Hospital, I wrote several medical abstracts and articles. The list below shows these items, culminating in "A case for intensive care," my very first publication for the general public.

Martin L: Non-respiratory (Metabolic) acid-base disorders in patients with pulmonary disease (abstract). *Am Rev Resp Dis* 113: 133, 1976.

Martin L: Respiratory failure. *Medical Clinics North American* 61, No. 6, 1369-1396, 1977.

Martin L: Hypoxemia without elevated carbon dioxide tension. *Chest* 77: 720-721, June, 1980 (Editorial).

Martin L: Asthma: Current Concepts in Outpatient Management. *Hospital Medicine*, February, 1981.

Jeffreys B and Martin L: On-line transmission and interpretation of arterial blood gas data. Abstract presented by Mr. Jeffreys at the 10th annual conference of the Society for Computer Medicine, San Diego, 1980.

Rosenberg DM, Martin L, Lerner P and Parker D. Legionnaires' disease: association with severe bronchospasm and hypoventilation. *Chest* 82: 383, 1982.

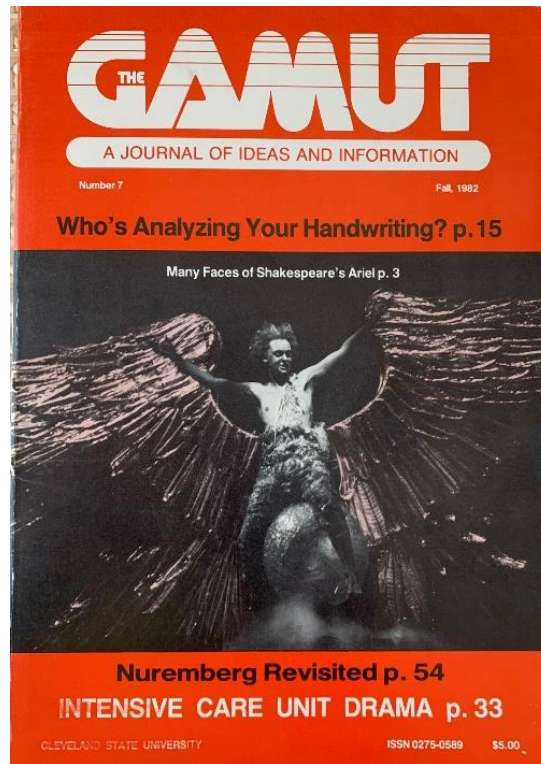
Martin L. A case for intensive care. *The Gamut*: No. 7, 33-42, Fall 1982.

Early in my career I also wrote numerous reports about patients claiming occupational lung disease; this aspect of my writing is discussed in later chapters. So, I was writing, but nothing for the general public, until 1982

In early 1982 I took care of a patient in the intensive care unit with severe pneumonia in both lungs. It was not due to infection, but to unknown cause, and he needed a ventilator to survive. His condition fit the diagnosis of "adult respiratory distress syndrome," or ARDS, first characterized during World War II as "shock lung." When he recovered, I decided to write a nonfiction account of his hospital course.

Cleveland State University had a quarterly literary magazine, *The Gamut*, and I sent it in. They published it as "A Case for Intensive Care," in the 1982 Fall issue. The *Gamut's* circulation

was small and mainly local, but I was thrilled with getting the story published, and the fact they put a teaser on the cover.



Lawrence Martin

A Case for Intensive Care

Often a hospital's Intensive Care Unit can do no more than keep a patient alive while the body tries to heal itself. Without such support a critically-ill patient has no chance. Even with full ICU support, the outcome may be disastrous. Presented here is an actual case history; the names and a few identifying characteristics have been changed to prevent any possible identification.

I would write several more ICU-patient stories, published over the next decade in *The Gamut*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, and other periodicals.

I enjoyed writing for the general public, and soon got the idea of a book on lung diseases for patients. The result was my first published book, *Breathe Easy: A Guide to Lung Diseases for Patients and Their Families*.

Breathe Easy

From 1976 to 1979, Mt. Sinai Hospital’s Pulmonary Division had only one physician – me. We had technicians and respiratory therapists, of course, but when out of town I had to secure coverage from an outside lung doctor, who was then given temporary hospital privileges. During those three years, I did not even think of writing a book. I was busy with lectures to medical students and residents, seeing patients, writing consultation reports to referring doctors, and those dreaded committee meetings.

Another pulmonary physician joined me in 1979, and from that point on there were always two lung doctors in the hospital, so coverage was not a problem.

In addition to my medical lectures, I was often invited to speak to lay groups about common lung diseases, and even once went on local television to talk about some conditions. In both medical and lay lectures, I could almost always tell if I was connecting with the audience.

Asimov talks about audience connection in his posthumously published third autobiography, *I, Asimov*. Shuffling, foot movements, wandering eyes, are signs you’re not connecting. I had suffered through many clueless lecturers, and worked hard not to lose my audience. When telltale signs appeared – as they occasionally did – I repeated information as necessary to reconnect. At least there were no cell phones back then to annoy the speaker.

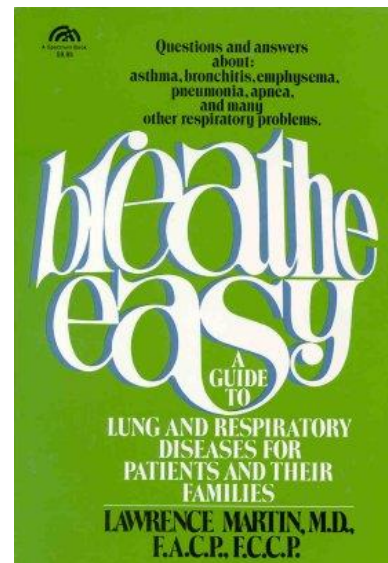


Unlike Asimov (a genius, remember), I had to prepare for each lecture; no way could I speak “off the cuff” as he always did, and give a coherent talk. For my lectures, I prepared slides, those Kodachrome 2x2s that fit in a carousel (see photo), with each slide projected on the screen.

By 1982 I had given dozens of lectures on a variety of lung diseases, and while driving home one day had an “ah ha” moment. Why not write a book on lung diseases, for the general public? All I had to do was transfer information on my slides to a readable prose format. Conditions I had not covered in lectures (mainly pediatric diseases) could easily be researched to generate the needed text.

It took about a year to write, and the result was *Breathe Easy: A Guide to Lung Diseases for Patients and Their Families*. I used a question-and-answer format to convey the information, and included a few photos and diagrams. The manuscript completed, I now had to find a publisher. The idea of self-publishing never crossed my mind. Back then, I don’t think I even knew what it meant to “self-publish.”

I scoured bookstores to see which publishers produced medical books for the general public, and wrote to several. To

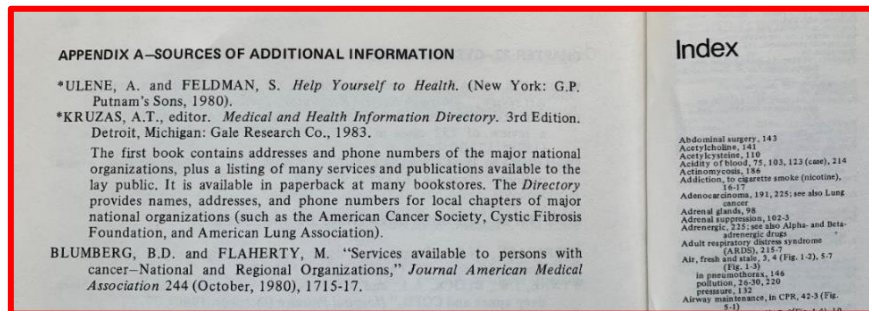


my surprise and delight, Prentice Hall, a division of Simon and Schuster, accepted my proposal and agreed to publish the book. I recall receiving a \$3,000 advance. They created a great cover and produced the index.

When I viewed the galleys, I was flabbergasted – and disheartened. One advantage of having a traditional publisher, as I was to be reminded over the ensuing decades, was good editing of your manuscript. Yet the galleys for *Breathe Easy* were a mess! Some sections had been rewritten so that my meaning was changed. “I do not recommend” ended up as “I do recommend.” Patients that started out as “he” in my case examples ended up as “she”; and figure legends written as complete sentences were shortened into phrases that made no sense. I found dozens of such errors. The offending editor (who sent me the galleys) apologized and blamed his junior associate. The mistakes got fixed.

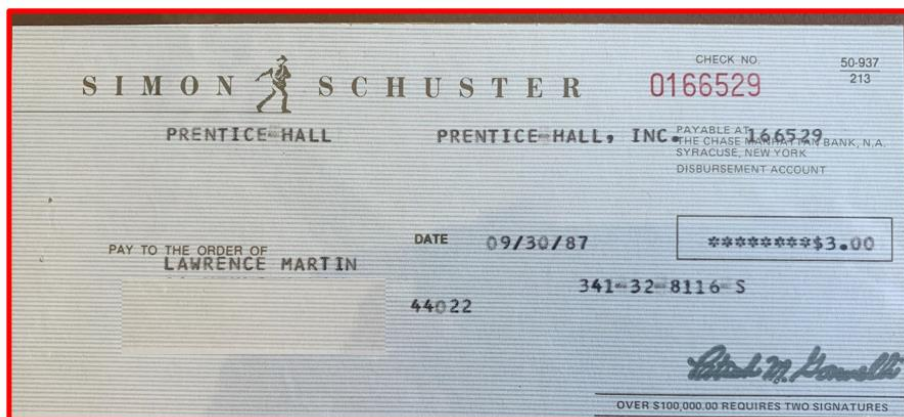
Another disappointment with the galleys of *Breathe Easy* was the index. It was technically okay but the font size was *tiny*, much smaller than the inside text. (Regular text font on left,

index font on right.) With the book still in galleys, I wrote to the indexer and asked about this situation. He explained he was a free-lancer hired by PH, and was told the index had to fit a certain number



of pages, no more. To comply and still have a full index, the font size was reduced. That made no sense – what’s wrong with a couple more pages? – but nothing I could do about it. Otherwise, the book was well-produced. *Breathe Easy* came out in both hardcover (for libraries) and paperback.

But it didn’t sell much. My first (and, I believe, only) royalty check beyond the advance payment was so exciting, I decided to frame it for posterity rather than cash it. The check hangs in my office today.



The lack of sales brought on the second disappointment, a harbinger, really, of future experience. PH did little, if any, promotion or advertising. Here was this great book about lung diseases, for the general public, and no one knew about it! Frustrated, I decided to publicize it

myself. This was, of course, pre-internet, so publicity meant print ads, radio, or television. I chose radio, and found a publicist who guaranteed a certain number of radio interviews for a fixed fee. I don't remember the exact cost, but only that it was over a thousand dollars. I figured, what the hell, it's worth a try. I went on several radio talk shows, speaking from my home phone, where the interviewer would ask me about the book and I'd expound.

I don't think the interviews created any blip in sales and, looking back, wonder if the whole thing was a scam. Was there really an audience for these radio interviews? Were they even real, or fake? They were all out-of-town radio shows, and I never received a single comment from anyone about them. In any case, it was a lesson that has stayed with me ever since, reinforced by other experiences with book advertising.

Money spent by the author on advertising rarely pays. You will likely never sell enough books to recoup what it costs to advertise.

My publishing appetite whetted, I then considered what to write next. I was done with nonfiction for the general public. What about writing for doctors?

Postscript

The editing mistakes in the *Breathe Easy* galleys were the first in a long line of professional editor screwups I encountered. Practically every time an editor altered my work he or she made it worse. This was the situation with my first medical textbook *Pulmonary Physiology in Clinical Practice*, and also in several articles sent to magazines and journals, for both doctors and a general audience. The most egregious example came about in 1985, detailed in the next chapter.

The Alveolar Gas Equation – Don't Mess With It!

As stated earlier, practically every time one of my manuscripts was “edited” by the publisher, it came out worse. This was sometimes due to sheer incompetence (see *Breathe Easy*), other times due to non-physicians trying to alter medical information without consulting me. In 1985, I submitted a medical article to the peer-review journal *Respiratory Care*, titled “Abbreviating the Alveolar Gas Equation: An Argument for Simplicity.” The equation is used in clinical medicine to figure out how much oxygen a patient is inhaling.

The full equation is rather complex. My article included a discussion on the origins of the equation and a proposal to use a simple version when caring for patients. I received the pre-publication galley, reviewed them closely, and found nothing amiss.

Imagine my surprise when the published article contained serious mistakes – so bad that they *altered the entire point of the paper!* My argument for simplicity had been subverted; it no longer made sense.

I was upset and wrote the managing editor. I pointed out the mistakes and asked that he prominently feature the corrections in a subsequent issue.

The editor did more than that. He re-published the entire article in the next issue (January 1986) with the notation on the bottom of the first page, enlarged below.

Abbreviating the Alveolar Gas Equation:
An Argument for Simplicity*

Lawrence Martin MD

The long form of the alveolar gas equation involves several assumptions that make precise calculation of PAO₂ virtually impossible. Despite this, past attempts to abbreviate the equation have sought an unwarranted degree of precision. In addition, well-defined normal values are not known for alveolar-arterial PO₂ difference at all FIO₂ levels and for all ages. Based on these considerations, any abbreviation of the alveolar gas equation should be simple, yet accurate enough for clinical purposes. The one equation that meets these criteria is PAO₂ = PIO₂ - 1.2(PaCO₂). When FIO₂ is above 0.60, the factor 1.2 can be eliminated for increased accuracy. (*Respir Care* 1986;31:40-44.)

The alveolar gas equation (commonly called the “alveolar air equation”) provides a calculated alveolar oxygen pressure (PAO₂) with which to compare measured arterial oxygen pressure (PaO₂) in the assessment of gas exchange in the lungs. Without reference to PAO₂, an isolated PaO₂ measurement conveys little gas-exchange information. The difference between the PAO₂ and the PaO₂—the P(A-a)O₂—provides an indication of gas-exchange abnormality. A P(A-a)O₂ above the normal range indicates pulmonary gas-transfer dysfunction, a result of ventilation-perfusion imbalance, diffusion barrier, or a shunt of blood through or past the lungs.

It is time to reassess clinical use of the alveolar gas equation. Several authors have discussed abbreviated forms of the rather forbidding equation.¹⁻³ Their intent was to provide a more ready method of calculating PAO₂. I wish to make three points concerning use of the equation and these past attempts to simplify it.

Point 1: The original alveolar gas equation includes several variables whose precise measurements are seldom known.

The equation⁴ states

$$PAO_2 = PIO_2 - PACO_2 \left[FIO_2 + \frac{(1 - FIO_2)}{R} \right], \quad (1)$$

where

- PIO₂ = pressure of inspired oxygen in the trachea, which equals (FIO₂)(PB - PH₂O);
- PACO₂ = pressure of alveolar carbon dioxide;
- FIO₂ = fractional concentration of inspired oxygen;
- R = respiratory exchange ratio (CO₂ excretion/O₂ uptake by the lungs);
- PB = barometric pressure;
- PH₂O = airway water-vapor pressure.

Another way of expressing the alveolar gas equation is Equation 2, which is a different arrangement of the same variables.^{5,6}

$$PAO_2 = PIO_2 - \frac{PACO_2}{R} + \frac{(PACO_2)(FIO_2)}{R} \left(\frac{1 - R}{R} \right). \quad (2)$$

Both arrangements (Equations 1 and 2) are presented here because they help explain the abbreviated versions discussed hereafter.

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*This paper as it was originally published (*Respir Care* 1985; 30:964-968) contained serious typographical errors. It is reprinted here with the errors corrected.

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RESPIRATORY CARE • JANUARY '86 Vol 31 No 1

***This paper as it was originally published (*Respir Care* 1985; 30:964-968) contained serious typographical errors. It is reprinted here with the errors corrected.**

Of course the notation didn't tell readers that the "serious typographical errors" were actually serious *editing* errors. No matter. I felt gratified – and vindicated.

Postscript

While this was the most serious example of sloppy editing, there were many more to come. The irony is that, once I entered the realm of self-publishing, "poor editing" was repeatedly emphasized as the bane of self-publishers. No doubt true, but having a traditional publisher – whether for a book, magazine, or medical journal – is no guarantee you'll receive decent editing. More examples to come.

Don't assume a professional editor will always do a good job. Often they do not.

Pulmonary Physiology in Clinical Practice

One reason I went into pulmonary medicine was that I loved the physiology: basically, how the body works in terms of blood flow, breathing in oxygen, and breathing out carbon dioxide. I became something of an expert in this area.

Mt. Sinai Hospital's Pulmonary Division was responsible for doing an important test called arterial blood gases. In this test a syringe sample of arterial blood (taken from the artery in the patient's wrist) is brought to the lab and run through machines that measure the pressures of oxygen and carbon dioxide, and also the blood acidity. The terms for these measurements are O₂ for oxygen, CO₂ for carbon dioxide, and pH for acidity.

Proper interpretation of these "blood gases" requires some detailed knowledge of basic physiology, and that was my area of expertise. I taught the subject whenever the opportunity arose. There are of course other areas of physiology important to lung diseases, such as how the heart pumps blood to the lungs, how we breathe during sleep, and what happens when you go up in altitude. All fascinating stuff – to me.

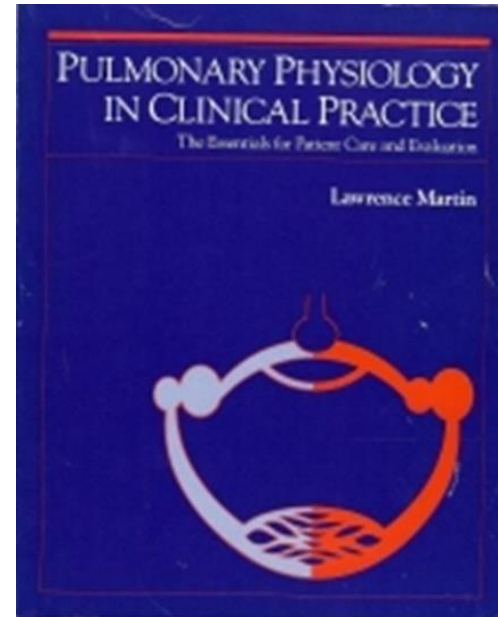
Why not write about it? In 1984 or 1985, I set about this task, but this time decided to find a publisher before finishing the book. A colleague at Mt. Sinai had written books for C.V. Mosby, a major medical publisher, and gave me a contact. I wrote to this person and my proposal was accepted! Hallelujah!

The book – *Pulmonary Physiology in Clinical Practice* – was a labor of love. First, I was able to put in prose all that I had learned on the subject, and make it relevant to medical students and doctors caring for patients. The "In Clinical Practice" was critical to the book's theme and success. You needed to know this stuff to give the best care to patients.

Anticipating its use as a medical school textbook, I edited this manuscript even more extensively than *Breathe Easy*, rewriting each chapter at least twenty times. As far as I was concerned the manuscript was ready for publication as submitted. Unfortunately, I encountered – yet again – editorial malfeasance.

The young and inexperienced editor assigned to the book must have felt the need to show her smarts. She decided to change my use of the personal pronoun "I" ("I recommend...", "I find...") to "we," even though the book has only one author. I wrote in a voice speaking directly to the reader, so the editorial "we" sounded especially artificial.

She also did not like use of the terms "arterial blood gas" and "chest x-ray" as nouns, notwithstanding everyday usage as such. Throughout the book she changed them to "arterial blood gas test" and "chest x-ray examination," needlessly stultifying my prose.



She also insisted on inserting “the” in places that made my sentences sound awkward and wordy, such “the ventilation-perfusion imbalance explains...”; “The PaCO₂ is proportional to...”.

These changes alone were bad enough, but she also found a way to change the meaning of many sentences. For example, when I wrote “reactive airways disease,” she changed it to “reactive airway disease,” thinking it sounded better grammatically, but the change just confused my explanation of asthma.

It took me a week to undo her damage. When I finally conveyed all the mistakes she yielded on most of them, and managed to restore what I wrote.

The book came out in late 1986, to much acclaim. *Pulmonary Physiology* and *Breathe Easy* certainly helped cement my position in the hospital, and my bona fides with the medical school. This was a high point of my career. Don’t blow it!

I did, in a way. Between the time I was first contracted to write the book and its publication, three different executives had been in charge of my project; All three had been enthusiastic about the book. However, by early 1987 they had all left the company, and now in charge was someone who really didn’t know much about the book, its history or intended market.

Over the following year I saw no advertising for the book, while Mosby did advertise other pulmonary books. One full-page ad in a medical journal for *five* of Mosby’s pulmonary medicine books omitted mine. Also, as a pulmonary medicine physician, I continued to receive ads in the mail from other publishers about their new pulmonary books, but never received one from Mosby for my book.

I started writing complaining letters to Mosby, stating that the new person in charge was “ignoring” my book. There was much back and forth between me and the Mosby principals, who offered lame explanations. “It’s not a standard textbook” (it never pretended to be). “It’s difficult to market to practicing physicians,” (it was mainly for medical students and doctors in training). At one point I even asked for a return of the copyright, so I could re-publish it with another company. No doubt I was still upset over Prentice Hall’s lack of publicity for *Breathe Easy*, and wasn’t going to let this pass. My book should have been included in Mosby’s ad.

Looking back at all this correspondence from the 1980s, I see I was naïve and way too impatient. I simply did not appreciate how long it can take for some books to “catch on.” It is also evident that the new Mosby person in charge did not really know how to market the book.

Anyway, sluggish sales and my yapping led them to decline a second edition, even though the book did continue to sell. When all the first edition copies sold out, I got the copyright back. I then contacted two other publishers to see if they would consider a new edition of the book. No interest.

If *Pulmonary Physiology* was a bad book, this scenario would make sense. No publisher wants to lose money. But that was not the case. The irony is that the book eventually gained traction, and was even translated into Japanese. For the next two decades I received dozens of inquiries from students asking where they could buy the long out-of-print English edition. Mosby was foolish to not continue with the book; they would have had a medical bestseller for sure. I

say this not without justification, because a later physiology textbook of mine, on arterial blood gases, has been in print for decades.

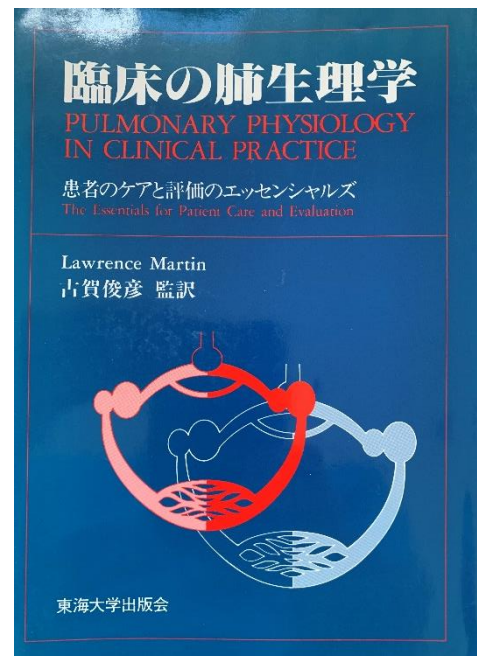
If the Mosby people I had originally worked with had not left the company, I think the book would have had a different outcome. But the new person in charge did not have much (?any) commitment to the book. Lesson learned:

Having a traditional publisher is no guarantee of success. The people you work with are more important than the name of the company.

Postscript

Once translated into Japanese (cover shown), the book attracted the attention of Dr. Toshihiko Koga, a pulmonary physician in Fukuoka, Japan. He invited me to speak at the 1993 Pan-Pacific Forum on Respiratory Care in Fukuoka, all expenses paid. After the conference (held in English), Ruth and I traveled to Tokyo, and then on the way home stopped in Hawaii. None of this would have happened if not for the book.

Years later, my book on blood gases, published by Lippincott, brought an invitation to speak at a medical conference in India. Take *that*, Mosby!



The Calm Before the Storm

Nineteen eighty-six marked our first decade in Cleveland, and we felt very fortunate. My job was everything I hoped for, Ruth had completed her psychiatry training at CWRU and was now working in the VA Hospital, and we had three healthy, beautiful girls. Joanna was born in 1973, Rachel in 1977, and Amy in 1983.

Our first two children were delivered by C-section. The obstetrician for our third child stated Ruth should not wait for labor, and just undergo a C-section close to her due date. He checked his schedule and said he could perform the operation on Monday, September 12th. “Was that date okay?” he asked. The delivery would be in Mt. Sinai Hospital. It also happened to be my 40th birthday. What a present!

I brought Ruth to the hospital, and went to my office to work. Okay, not really. The pulmonary staff knew what was happening, so I flitted about the hospital until the moment of delivery. I was not in the operating room, but close by. Amy Rebecca was born that morning. We took her home four days later.

Ruth went back to work part-time for the next couple of years. Her aunts and parents were now living in Cleveland, and we had plenty of help raising the girls.

One problem was that our colonial-style house now felt too small. The kids’ bedrooms were tiny, and we wanted a first-floor bedroom. Our two-physician income allowed us to plan for a bigger house with the spaces we needed. The only other requirement was that it be in the same school district so our kids wouldn’t have to change schools.

None of the houses we viewed satisfied us. Then one day in 1986 we saw an ad for a two-acre lot in Moreland Hills, a nearby suburb in the same school district. To buy the lot we had to build a house using the owner’s builder and architect. The owner, henceforth known as the “developer,” actually owned three lots on this cul-de-sac street, each wooded and two acres in size. On the middle lot, he was building a house for his son; the lot for sale was at the end of the street.

We were smitten with the location and the chance to build exactly what we wanted. After meeting the developer’s architect and builder, we signed the contract for a 3500 sq. ft. house. The cost when completed would be around \$350,000. The blueprints looked great, the location was great, and if these people were building the developer’s son’s house, right next door, what could go wrong?

I was a busy pulmonary medicine physician. Ruth was working and raising three girls. We had no business background, knew nothing about building houses, and simply trusted people who presented themselves as professionals. At the time, we thought we were making a smart move. Only in retrospect do we look not so smart.

We moved into our newly-completed home in June 1987. With unpacking and all that goes with a new house, we initially didn't notice any problems. In early July we took a two-week family vacation to Chautauqua, the famed western New York summer Institute. This was our third summer vacation there, as it was ideal for us and the kids, on a beautiful lake, with lots of music and other activities.

The next two years would be hell.

Lawsuit!

On returning from Chautauqua in July 1987, we began to notice issues with the new house. The floors in several rooms sloped. The downstairs bathtub did not sit flush on the tile floor. Floor moldings in some rooms appeared crooked. We contacted the builder. He came out, mumbled a bit, and said he'd look into it. Nothing happened.

We contacted the architect. He came out, directed the builder to open a couple of walls, which he did, but no repairs were made. After just a few weeks of all talk, no repairs, it finally dawned on us that these two men were incompetent, and didn't have the knowledge or resources to fix the problem.

We contacted the developer, by letter, to make sure we had a written record. He ignored our letter. We sent him, over the following month, three more letters. All ignored.

We hired a lawyer. On his suggestion, we then hired four different experts to investigate the house, including a structural engineer. He found the root of the problem. Steel beams in the basement were inadequate to support the upper floors. The architect had simply screwed up, designating the wrong beams for the house. During construction, what should have been obvious, resulting defects, went undetected by the builder.

We obtained an estimate to repair the house: \$102,000, plus we would have to move out for three months during the reconstruction.

One might think this information would spur the developer and his cronies into action. *Nada*. We sent them all our experts' reports, but they just ignored us. No response. By this point, we had generated a mountain of documents, which would obviously have to be disclosed to any potential buyers, making the house totally unsalable. We were stuck with a fully-documented crooked house and no way out.

Our lawyer said the best legal path was to sue for rescission of the contract, to force the developer to buy back the house plus cover all our expenses. That meant at some point, if we prevailed legally, we would have to move. Having no other rational choice, we filed a lawsuit, which I believe was the largest single lawsuit over a defective family home filed in Ohio up to that time.

The developer and his cronies hired lawyers. Then we had depositions. The builder and architect came across as bozos, incompetents. The developer simply lied, said he responded to us when he never did. Then he claimed no responsibility, that all the problems were from the builder and architect. The builder and architect blamed each other.

None of this makes sense, I know. These were simply awful people, who would rather spend a few bucks fighting us legally than acting responsibly and fixing our house.

It took a year to get to trial, which took place in October 1988. We opted to have the case heard before only the assigned judge, without a jury, for two reasons. One, we were afraid a jury might drag out the trial, and we couldn't stay out of work for a long period. And two, there was a nagging feeling that no matter how just our case, a jury might not have much sympathy for two doctors complaining about their big new house on a two-acre lot.

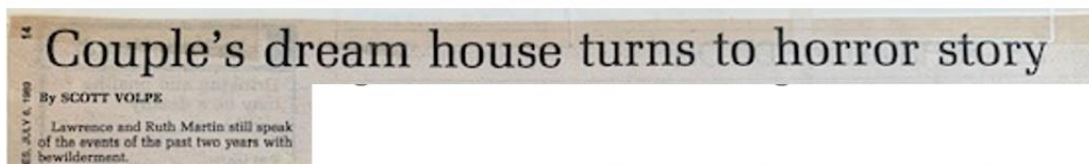
We did not figure on the judge having this prejudice, but that's what happened. When I testified how the developer had lied repeatedly, and how he never responded to four letters, the judge cut me off with "Well, that's like bad bedside manner." In other words, it didn't matter. What we went through to get to trial was simply irrelevant. Our anguish, our expenses, our pain – all irrelevant to this judge.

The trial lasted four days, then the judge took six weeks to render his verdict. It should have taken six minutes. He granted us rescission for the purchase price, but not a dollar for our legal fees or our expenses in hiring experts. And, of course, zippo for the aggravation and misery the developer put us through. The judge did require the builder and architect to pay our moving expenses. Considering legal and expert fees of \$45,000, and loss of appreciation of our home over three years (which accrued to the developer after he fixed up the house), we were out well over \$100,000.

In late spring of 1989, we moved to another suburb in the same Orange School District, into a smaller and much older home. Nice, but not what we contracted for in 1986.

By the summer of 1989 the trial decision, and our move out of the house, had garnered the interest of the local press. Not the Cleveland press, but the suburban newspapers that served Moreland Hills, namely *The Chagrin Herald Sun* and *The Chagrin Valley Times*. Both ran articles, and one interviewed the developer and architect to get their side of the story.

At least half a dozen news articles appeared that summer, culminating with a letter Ruth wrote rebutting what the developer had claimed in his interview.





The developer's account made it seem as if we had been unreasonable in the affair and that he was himself a victim of the bad construction, an attitude reflecting his deep-seated sociopathy. Ruth's letter was published in *The Chagrin Valley Times* August 17, 1989. She details the true events, how the developer lied, and how his total non-response led to the lawsuit. The paper published it under the title "Disturbed by distortions." Here are the last two paragraphs.

We could go on and on. It was a nightmare. There is no other way to describe it. All we wanted was our house fixed to acceptable standards. We obviously did not want to spend \$55,000 on legal and experts' fees to pursue a lawsuit and go to trial, but we had no choice.

Finally, I have two questions for the defendants in our case. If the house was so easy to fix for resale, why didn't they fix it for us? Why did they spend more fighting us and going to trial than it cost to fix our house? To this day we simply don't know the answers to these questions. Nor do we understand Mr. S....'s motive in treating us so badly for so long.

Ruth S. Martin
Pepper Pike

All of which brings me to my first self-published book. I kept meticulous records of the whole ordeal. To salvage something from the nightmare, and perhaps as a catharsis, I decided to write a factual account of the saga, and include lessons learned that might help other people building a new home. I thought of an Agatha Christie-type title, "And They Built a Crooked House." Loved it back then, love it today.

And They Built A Crooked House

Though this saga took place well before the internet, some research in books and newspapers showed me that defective new home construction was not uncommon across the country, and that homeowners invariably “lost” monetarily. Our developer was an independent businessman, but many homeowners were (and presumably still are) victims of corporate malfeasance in single-home construction. Thus, the subtitle: “How to Protect Yourself,” which I thought would add to the book’s appeal.

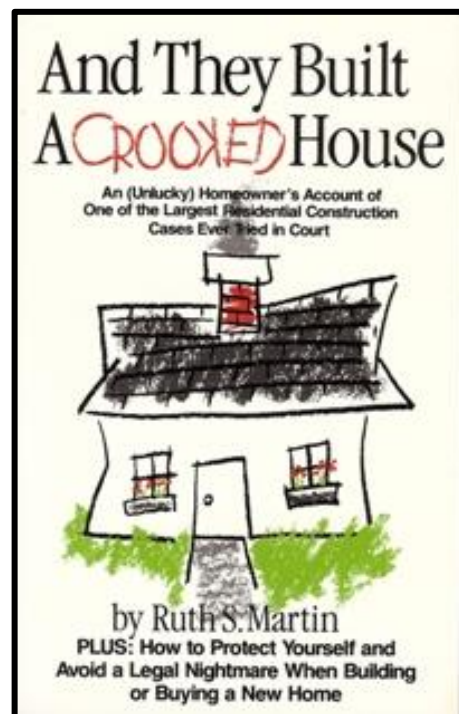
I wanted to publicize what happened to us but didn’t want personal publicity. My goal was to write a book that would sell, but without drawing attention to me or affect my medical career. To this end, I changed the name of the suburb to Emerald Hills, and changed the names of all the participants. I included copies of original legal documents but blacked out the names in each one. I also decided to write it in Ruth’s name, for two reasons.

First, while my clinical work had never suffered from this ordeal, I had in fact lost over a year of writing anything medical. Almost all my spare time was spent keeping notes, doing research on defective house construction, and fighting the case. I didn’t want to give any impression that I wasn’t fully devoted to my career during this period.

Second, the book was brutally honest about the agony and pain we went through, trying to juggle our careers and raise a family during this legal nightmare. It just sounded better from a woman’s point of view. Also, Ruth was a board-certified psychiatrist, and you couldn’t argue with her assessment of the developer as a true sociopath.

She readily agreed to put her name on the cover. Thus, I wrote the book, except for the page where she characterized the developer’s persona as classic sociopathy. In addition, she proofread the manuscript and made valuable editing suggestions. We did not seek the help of any outside reviewers.

Once the book was completed. I set up my own company to publish it: Lakeside Press. LP would produce several more books in the years to come, and its history will be told in another chapter.



In my attempt to make *Crooked House* interesting to the general public, I divided the book into six parts, giving each part a catchy title, e.g., “We Should Have Been Paranoid,” “We are Jerked Around by the Legal System, then Jerked Around some more.” In the last part of the book, I tried to make what we learned useful to the universe of new home buyers; I titled that part “Don’t Think We’re Unique: This Could Happen to Anyone.”

I was aware of the fictional *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House*, by Eric Hodgins, published 1946. It’s a humorously told (!) tale of one family’s attempt to build a modest country home, and all the aggravation, cost overruns and disappointments that ensued. The book became a best seller, and was made into a popular movie starring Cary Grant, Myrna Loy, and Melvyn Douglas. The film, released in 1948, was heavily promoted as ‘a comedy.’”

Crooked House is nothing like *Mr. Blandings*, book or movie. It is not funny, and will likely never be made into a movie, unless the horror genre somehow morphs into stories about new home construction. Maybe *Halloween Crooked House*?

Anyway, being naïve in the realm of agenting and publishing, I thought there could be a market for *Crooked House*. A legal saga, with important information about avoiding this nightmare for potential new-home buyers. Alas, at least a dozen publishers and agents I queried didn’t think so. I did get a few responses to my query letters, basically, “this is not for us,” or “it’s more for a magazine article than a book.”

I was not going to let the book die. At the time (spring of 1991) the only two options to self-publish were to use a vanity publisher or just hire a printer. I opted not to use a vanity publisher, because of the huge up-front expense and my knowledge gained from the first two books: the more money you spent, the more you would lose. I did hire a local artist to do the cover, then sent the manuscript to a book printer, Book Masters in Ashland, Ohio, which did a decent job.

But it was not cheap. The minimum order was for 2000 books, at a total cost of \$4725, or about \$2.30 a book. Today, it would cost nothing to upload the digital file on Amazon, and then a copy would only be printed when someone orders it. (For writers who self-published in the pre-internet era, the change brought about by Amazon and print-on-demand is simply stunning.) So, we had 2000 copies in our basement, which I priced at \$10 each.

Our story, by now known to a lot of people in Cleveland, had local interest, and I was able to get the book into some libraries and at least one independent bookstore. Two newspapers wrote articles about our saga, interviewing Ruth, and she spoke to a couple of clubs about the book. For a while we generated some sales, but nothing out of the local area. Book-sale-wise, another disappointment.



Crooked House was my first taste of self-publishing. It was doable three decades ago, though is vastly easier today with Amazon, print-on-demand, and e-books. However, one thing has not changed.

For self-published books, writing is the easier part. The harder part is in promotion and marketing.

Postscript

After the initial spate of publicity, which lasted only a few weeks after the book came out, we ceased all discussion of the saga except among ourselves. I did publish another consumer-oriented book about home building, also under Ruth's name (see *Crumbling Dreams*), but for all outward appearances, the event was over. It was never discussed with our kids except in the most superficial manner, and we never asked them to read *Crooked House*, knowing it would be too painful. While our Cleveland friends certainly knew a general outline of the debacle, we never brought it up in conversation. To obsess around other people would have served no purpose.

When I set up a website for Lakeside Press, in the mid-1990s, I uploaded the book, where it remains to this day. <http://www.lakesidepress.com/crooked-house/contents.html>

Lakeside Press

To publish *Crooked House*, I set up my own publishing company. I went to the library and searched a reference book that listed all the extant publishing companies. The name I wanted was not in there – Lakeside Press (LP)

I chose the name because at the time (1990) we had a small sailboat on Lake Erie, at the Lakeside Yacht Club. The name just appealed to me, and without further rigamarole, I established Lakeside Press as my publishing arm.

However, considering the nature of LP's first book, I didn't want to use either my home or hospital address. So, I rented a post office box on Mayfield Road, a busy commercial street in a nearby Cleveland suburb, and that became the "headquarters" of Lakeside Press. Every book I've self-published since then has been under the Lakeside Press imprint (though the address has shifted to Florida). As soon as the internet became available, in the mid-1990s, I acquired the website address: www.lakesidepress.com.

Within a few months of setting up Lakeside Press, I began to get inquiries about the availability of out-of-print books – published by Lakeside Press! Turns out there *was* a company by that name that no longer existed, but at one time had published numerous books. This information was not in the comprehensive directory of publishers. I decided I would not change the name, and it's been ongoing for over 30 years. For a decade or so I continued to get out-of-print book inquiries.

The no-longer-in-business "Lakeside Press" has a Wikipedia page, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lakeside_Press. Click on it and you will find this information.

Lakeside Press was a Chicago [publishing imprint](#) under which the [RR Donnelley](#) Company produced fine books as well as mail order catalogs, telephone directories, encyclopedias, and advertising. The Press was best known for its high quality editions for the Chicago [Caxton Club](#) as well as the Lakeside Classics, a series of fine reprints.

The printing plant, which was located along with company headquarters in the [Lakeside Press Building](#) on 22nd Street and Calumet Avenue, was closed in 1993, after which production moved to several other RRD plants.

While the printing plant may have closed in 1993, in 1990 there was no company by that name listed as still in business.

Wikipedia does not have an entry for *my* Lakeside Press. It is searchable, however. The screenshot below shows the first part of a google search for "lakeside press." My LP is third on the list.

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For a complete listing of all books and plays by Lawrence Martin, MD, please click here.

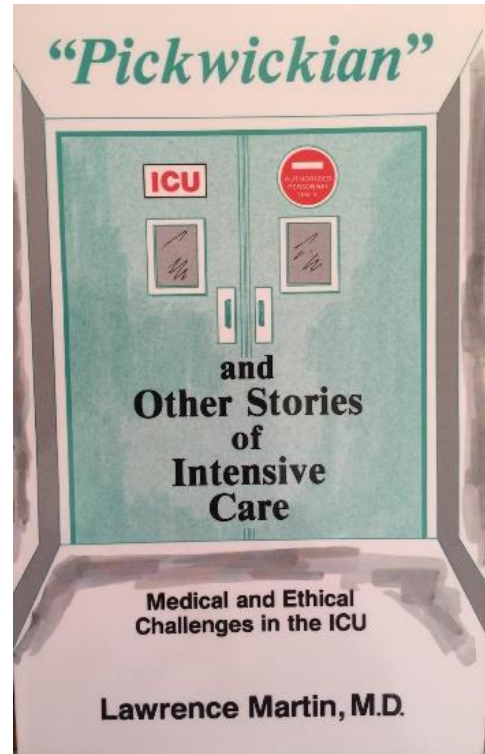


“Pickwickian”

During the three years that encompassed our house debacle, starting mid-1987, I didn’t quit medical writing entirely. I continued to write medical stories about intensive care patients, the same type of nonfiction as my 1982 story published in *The Gamut* (“A Case for Intensive Care”).

I managed to get four of them published in the first half of 1991. Two came out in *Medical Economics*, a “throw away” magazine sent to doctors (hopefully read before being thrown away), one in *The Gamut*, and one in *The Saturday Evening Post*.

- “Hammer Home the Message to Patients Who Smoke,” in *Medical Economics*, January 1991
- “Pickwickian,” in *The Gamut*, Winter 1991
- “We can’t kill your mother!” in *Medical Economics*, March 1991
- “Mr. Bowman’s Solution,” in *The Saturday Evening Post*, April 1991



I had also written other stories not yet published, so by the spring of 1991 I had a nice collection of twenty published and unpublished patient-centered stories. I decided they would make a good anthology. Intrigued by the Pickwickian tale, I made it the book’s title: *Pickwickian and Other Stories of Intensive Care*. Each story came with a medical or ethical challenge, hence the subtitle shown on the cover.

The title story is about a patient with Pickwickian Syndrome, a condition where obesity leads to sleep apnea, and to excessive sleepiness during the day.

The name comes from a character in Charles Dickens’s first novel, *Pickwick Papers*, published in 1837. At the end of Chapter 53, Dickens introduces a scene involving the fat boy, Joe. I quote part of this scene in my story, then give some background about how the syndrome came to be named “Pickwickian.” Historical detail, when it is germane to the story *and* I think could be interesting to the reader, is used throughout these stories.

In *Pickwick Papers*, Joe knocks on a clerk’s door. The clerk opens the door and finds the boy standing up, sleeping, and snoring “feebly.” The boy suddenly wakes up and starts his knocking motion again, though the door is now open.

“What the devil do you knock in that way for?” inquired the clerk, angrily.

“Which way?” said the boy, in a slow and sleepy voice.

“Why, like forty hackney-coachmen,” replied the clerk.

“Because master said, I wasn’t to leave off knocking till they opened the door, for fear I should go to sleep,” said the boy.

Dickens’s 19th-century portrayal lay medically dormant for over a century, until 1956 when Dr. C.S. Burwell and colleagues published a medical case report, “Extreme Obesity Associated With Alveolar Hypoventilation: a Pickwickian Syndrome.” (“alveolar hypoventilation” is a medical term for under breathing, so the patient doesn’t bring in enough oxygen.) After quoting Dickens’s description of the corpulent Joe, the authors went on to describe their patient, a 51-year-old business executive who stood 5 feet 5 inches and weighed over 260 pounds:

[He] entered the hospital because of obesity, fatigue and somnolence. . . The patient was accustomed to eating well but did not gain weight progressively until about one year before admission . . . As the patient gained weight his symptoms appeared and became worse . . . he had often fallen asleep while carrying on his daily routine . . . on several occasions he suffered brief episodes of syncope [fainting]. Persistent edema of the ankles developed . . . Finally, an experience which indicated the severity of his disability led him to seek hospital care. The patient was accustomed to playing poker once a week and on this crucial occasion he was dealt a hand of three aces and two kings. According to Hoyle this hand is called a “full house.” *Because he had dropped off to sleep he failed to take advantage of this opportunity.* [Italics original]. A few days later he entered . . . hospital.

. . . Therapy consisted chiefly of enforced weight reduction by means of an 800-calory diet. On this regimen the patient’s weight fell from 121.4 to 103.6 kg [267 to 228 pounds] in a period of three weeks. As he lost weight his somnolence, twitching, periodic respiration, dyspnea and edema gradually subsided and his physical condition became essentially normal.

After that first medical paper, innumerable patients were diagnosed with “Pickwickian syndrome.” My patient, Mrs. Fallows, had this condition and I went on to describe her clinical course (not good). At age 63, and a little over five feet tall, she weighed 285 lbs. She was admitted with a low oxygen level and shortness of breath, and soon ended up needing mechanical ventilation, which meant a tube in her throat connected to the ventilator. Here is a section where I am on rounds with the interns and residents, at a time when our patient is still ventilator-dependent. I am asking the questions.

“How can we safely get her off the ventilator in the next few days? She’s not going to lose enough weight to make a big difference in a few days. How are we going to do it?”

“Diuretics,” someone said.

“Diuretics will help mobilize excess water, but probably won’t make much of a dent in her belly. Anyway, she’s already on Lasix [a potent diuretic]. Any other ideas?”

No answer.

“Well, there’s one way,” I said. “A therapy too little used in intensive care. What is it?”

They were stumped by my guess-what-I'm-thinking question.
"I'll give you a hint. It's not a drug and not a medical device."
"What else is there?" asked Sherry.
"I'll give you another hint. It's an elemental force of nature. One of the four primary forces."
"Ohhhhhhh," swooned one of the heretofore silent residents, a quiet chap who had been listening intently.
"Yes?" I asked.
"Isaac Newton."
"That's right! Very good. We're going to use *gravity*. It's free and every room is equipped. If we don't get that tube out of her throat soon, she's bound to have a major complication. Infection or airway damage. A tracheostomy on Mrs. Fallows would be very difficult. She has no neck. A surgeon looking to place a hole in her trachea could get lost." The house staff glanced back at Gloria, visible through the glass door, and nodded in agreement.
"We've got to get her off the ventilator," I said. "The easiest way to take advantage of gravity is with . . . an anti-gravity bed."
"What's that?"
"A bed that will allow her to sit up without sliding. Look at her. She's in the anti-breathing position, all squinched up in bed. With the typical hospital bed like this one, you can't keep her abdomen from attacking her chest. How can anyone breathe with all that weight squeezing the lungs? If we can just unload her lungs a bit, I think we can get her off the ventilator."
"Marsha," I said to our head nurse, "can we get her one of those Big Boy beds? You know, the kind we used for that five-hundred-pound patient?"
"Sure, Dr. Martin. I'll see what I can do."

Now, with a book of twenty stories about interesting patients, written for the general public, what to do with it? Surely, this one will find a publisher. *First, I needed to find an agent.*

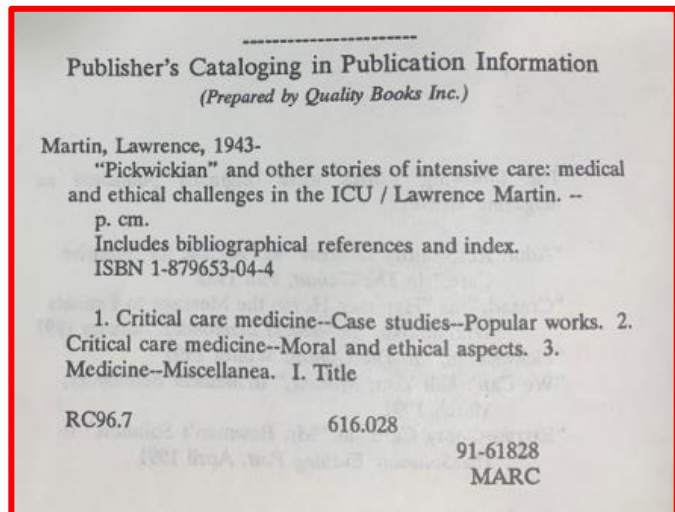
I searched *Writers' Digest* for a list of agents, found a few who accepted this type of nonfiction and wrote to them. One answered with interest, an agent in New Jersey. I sent him the book and he was enthusiastic! Said it was good and should find a publisher.

I signed a one-year agent's contract and waited. He sent out numerous inquiries. Had any publisher responded, and perhaps suggested some revisions, I would have been happy to make changes. But my agent never got any positive response. He was as disappointed (and surprised) as I was. After the year was up, he released me from the contract and I was back to square one. Self-publish.

I secured an ISBN ("International Standard Book Number") from Bowker, a unique number that identifies every published book. I also developed an index, then sent the formatted manuscript to Book Masters, the company that printed *Crooked House*. This time I was able to take delivery of fewer copies, "only" 800, at a printing cost of \$2800, or \$3.50 a book.

Pickwickian came out in 1991 and I priced it at \$10.95. The book's front matter, arranged by the printer, is shown below.

It was a nicely-printed book but...another load into the basement. I gave them away to nurses in the hospital (the book was dedicated to our ICU nurses), and some friends and relatives. Sold a few in the local bookstore. I did put one small ad in a medical journal, but otherwise did little to promote the book. So, not surprisingly, it never took off.



Apart from the usual complaint among self-published authors about the difficulty of marketing and promotion, there is another lesson here, one that became more relevant in retirement.

If you are fortunate to secure an agent for your book, you must give the agent at least a year to find a publisher. If the agent does not succeed, you've lost a year.

Then, even if a publisher accepts your book, it typically takes one to two years to come out. So, let's generalize and say you have a book you want traditionally published (i.e., not self-published) and you go through an agent, a requirement for all the big publishers. You are looking at two-three years before your book goes on sale. That's not a big deal in your 30s, 40s, or even 50s. But in your 60s or 70s, it is.

When it became easy to self-publish, the choice for senior citizens with a completed manuscript evolved into one of three main options.

- Seek an agent, which would likely require many query letters and, if you land one, be prepared to wait up to three years if your book does get published, or at least a year if it doesn't.
- Sign up with one of the innumerable publishers that advertise heavily to authors, and that charge hefty upfront fees. They range from vanity publishers whose business model is only to sell books and services to the author, to companies with the opposite business model -- to actually sell books to the public. Within this spectrum is a vast number of publishers, and any author signing a contract must do diligent research to ensure the company fits his or her needs. The former type of business model is, in my opinion, to be avoided. The one denominator of all these companies is that you will pay a large amount of money upfront, an amount that will likely never be recovered from book sales.
- Develop the book using a la carte services as needed (e.g., cover design, editing,

formatting), then publish on one of the available self-publishing platforms (e.g., Amazon’s KDP, Draft2Digital, Ingram Spark). This task can be accomplished within days (e-book) or a few weeks (print) of uploading your formatted manuscript and book cover.

Of course, the difficulty of finding an agent greatly influences the decision. If it was easy, most authors would probably go with that option. But it’s not easy; for seniors writing their first book, it’s almost impossible, as agents really want younger authors who have the years to put out more books if the first one is successful. Thus, the attitude of most senior citizens: I want my book published now, and don’t want to risk losing a year with an agent, or waiting two-three years for it to come out; I might not be around to see it happen.

Hence, the vast majority of retirees new to book writing end up in some type of self-publishing scenario. My experience with “Pickwickian” in 1991 weighed heavily on publishing decisions when I turned to writing fiction, which began near retirement.

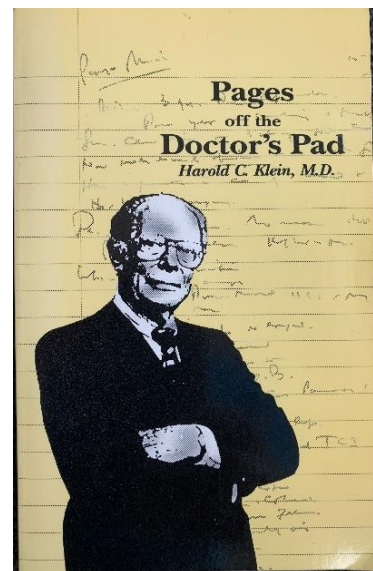
I always thought *Pickwickian* was a good book, with well-told stories. I wasn’t going to let it die. That’s why I published it twice more, in 2000 and again in 2020: new and improved editions under new titles. One of the good things about self-publishing (yes there are some) is that you retain full copyright and can do anything you want with your book.

Postscript – Dr Harold Klein and *Pages off the Doctor’s Pad*

I set up Lakeside Press to publish my own books, but I also published one for a colleague, Dr. Harold Klein. He was a practicing internist, on staff of Mt. Sinai Hospital and a fellow writer. He had seen a copy of *Pickwickian*, and told me he also had a collection of patient-centered stories; would Lakeside Press publish his collection? I explained that my company wasn’t set up to publish other writer’s books, since I had no distribution channels, no employees, really none of the trappings of what most people consider a book publishing company.

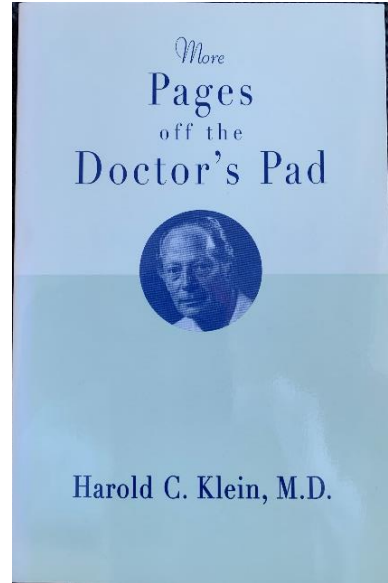
My disclosure bothered Dr. Klein not a bit. He just wanted help getting the book in print, and I seemed to know the ropes. So, with no money changing hands, I arranged for his book, *Pages off the Doctor’s Pad*, to be “published” under the Lakeside imprint. That meant using a Lakeside Press ISBN (International Standard Book Number), getting the completed manuscript to a company that handled formatting (Quality Books, Inc.), then to the book printer (Book Masters, in nearby Ashland, OH). Dr. Klein dealt directly with these companies for all fees, and took delivery of the books to his home, as I had for *Pickwickian*. *Pages off the Doctor’s Pad* is short at 109 pages, well written and very readable. It’s nice that the front matter shows “published by Lakeside Press.”

Dr. Klein died in 1996, age 81. Turns out he had written more patient stories than in the book. A few years passed and his widow, Miriam Klein, wanted to have them published as well, under the title *More Pages off the*



Doctor's Pad. She asked a friend to help her prepare the manuscript for publication, and this friend suggested the sequel should also be published by Lakeside Press. I was asked if that was acceptable, even though I would not be involved in any aspect of the work; Miriam and her friend would handle everything, including all editing and securing print copies. I readily agreed, and gave them one of my ISBN's. *More Pages off the Doctor's Pad*, consisting of twelve fascinating stories, came out in 1999, "published" by Lakeside Press.

Although I did receive a few more "publishing inquiries" over the years, I never sought to publish any other authors. Dr. Klein's are the only books under Lakeside Press I didn't write.



William Carlos Williams, M.D. (1883 -1963)

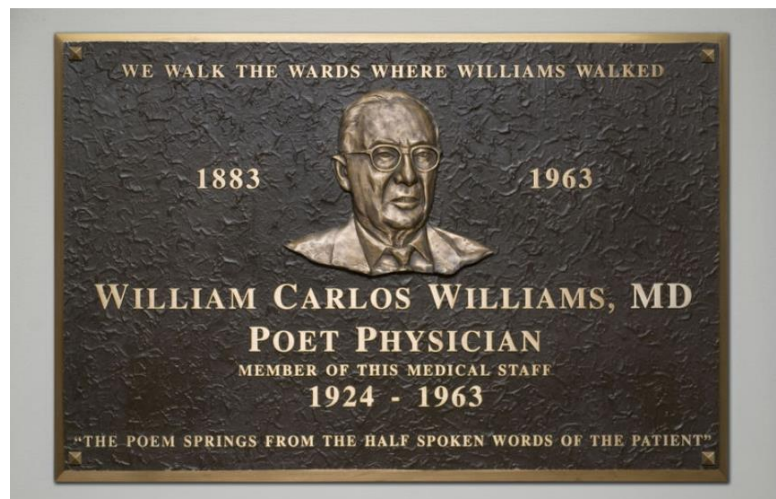
Wikipedia provides a comprehensive listing of physician writers, defined as “physicians who write creatively in fields outside their practice of medicine.”¹ Two writers are from antiquity (Ctesias and St. Luke) and three are from the Middle Ages (Avicenna, Halevi, and Maimonides). Starting in the 1500s, the writers are listed by century and with each century the lists grow longer, except for the 21st, which has a way to go yet. Most of the doctors are relative unknowns, but several are quite famous, e.g., Anton Chekhov, Albert Schweitzer, Benjamin Spock, Arthur Conan Doyle, Robin Cook, and Oliver Sacks.

There is a wide spectrum of how doctors balanced writing and a medical career. On one extreme are Somerset Maugham, Walker Percy, and Michael Crichton, who obtained medical degrees in 1897, 1941, and 1969, respectively, but never practiced medicine. Maugham achieved success writing novels (*Of Human Bondage*), plays, and short stories. Percy developed TB during his training and left medicine to become a successful novelist (*The Moviegoer*) and nonfiction writer (*Lost in the Cosmos*). Crichton achieved phenomenal success with his novels, including movies made from them (e.g., *The Andromeda Strain*, *Jurassic Park*, *The Lost World*, and *The Great Train Robbery*.)

In my limited survey of some famous physician writers, I found that most practiced medicine for at least part of their working life but quit when they became famous (or just rich enough to quit). Good examples are Arthur Conan Doyle, author of Sherlock Holmes stories; world-famous playwright Anton Chekhov (*Three Sisters*, *The Cherry Orchard*); and Robin Cook, author of *Coma*, *Virus*, and other bestselling medical-themed novels.

Then there are those who continued to practice medicine throughout most or all of their medical career while writing for the public, most notably Dr. William Carlos Williams. I don't know of any other physician who practiced medicine so consistently while creating output that led to writing fame. Williams was a pediatrician in Rutherford, NJ, and chief of pediatrics in nearby Passaic General Hospital from 1924 until his demise in 1963. Yet he produced poetry and fiction that, late in life at least, made him famous.

Bronze plaque in lobby of Passaic General Hospital, where Dr. Williams was on staff from 1924 until his death in 1963.



Williams is mainly well-known for his poetry. His most anthologized poem is “The Red Wheelbarrow,” published in 1923 in a book titled *Spring and All*.² It consists of only 16 words.

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens

About this poem, Williams is quoted as stating: “The wheelbarrow in question stood outside the window of an old negro’s house on a back street in the suburb where I live. It was pouring rain and there were white chickens walking about in it.”³

I am not a poet and have no experience critiquing poetry. While to me “The Red Wheelbarrow” seems like a very brief and unsophisticated collection of words, critics elevate the poem to a level of great meaning.

(It’s an example of) Williams using simplified language” showing that “ordinary things” can be special. One critic compares it to “an American variant of the haiku,” and “the poem is also a painterly composition, the red of the utilitarian wheelbarrow played off against the white of the chickens.”³

Williams wrote hundreds of poems and is now widely recognized as a major American poet of the twentieth century. However, widespread recognition was late in coming. In May 1963, he was posthumously awarded the Pulitzer Prize for one of his poetry books, *Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems*.⁴

He was, according to biographers, largely ignored until late in life when his poetry was taken up by others.

Williams did not receive the recognition he deserved until the 1960s when a new generation of poets filled the scene, among them Robert Lowell, Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, Denise Levertov, and David Ignatow.⁵

Achieving fame only late in life, or even posthumously, is well-documented among some now-revered writers, e.g., Emily Dickinson, Herman Melville, Edgar Allan Poe, and John Keats. The possibility of belated recognition should interest all writers who feel unappreciated – *our time may come*. However, that aspect of Williams’s life is not why he’s one of my profiled authors. I include him because of his prose, specifically *The Doctor Stories*, a collection of short stories put together by Robert Coles, M.D. and published in 1984. It includes stories originally published over three decades, from 1932 to 1962.⁶

Coles’ forward to the book is a panegyric to the author, who was his mentor. It is especially interesting for his comment on Williams’s two simultaneous careers.

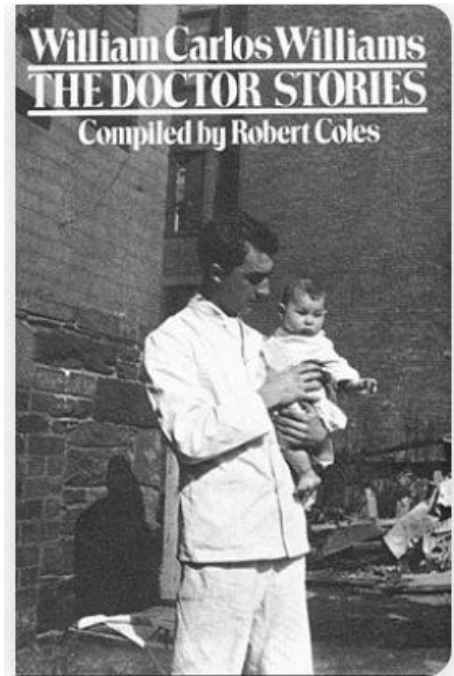
I remember asking Williams the usual, dreary question – one I hadn't stopped to realize he'd been asked a million or so times before: how did he do it, manage two full-time careers so well and for so long? His answer was quickly forthcoming, and rendered with remarkable tact and patience, given the provocation. "It's no strain. In fact, the one [medicine] nourishes the other [writing], even if at times I've groaned to the contrary." If he had sometimes complained that he felt drained, overworked, denied the writing time he craved, needed, he would not forget for long all the sustaining, healing, inspiring moments a profession – a calling, maybe, it was in his life – had given him moment upon moment in the course of more than four decades of medical work.⁶

At times I felt this way also. My writing was energized by my career: medical books for doctors and medical students, and books I wrote for the general public while still in practice (*Breath Easy*, *Pickwickian*, *Scuba Diving Explained*, *The Wall: Chronicle of a Scuba Trial*), plus multiple websites on a variety of topics. Like Williams, my writing and medical career went hand in hand.

Of course, he was of a different generation, different specialty, different focus (mainly poetry) and writing style. Williams's "doctor stories" are also vastly different from my own "ICU stories," both in clinical content (he never worked in an ICU) and prose style. My writing is straightforward, has a single point of view, and doesn't challenge the reader to know just who is speaking. In the excerpt from *Pickwickian* quoted in the previous chapter, all the dialogue has quotation marks and, where needed, speech tags.

Williams' prose rambles, changes point of view frequently in a single story, does not use quotation marks for dialogue and skimps on needed speech tags. As result, sometimes you don't know who is speaking, or thinking. This type of prose is often called "literary" and appeals to critics. My writing is not literary and strives only to be readable and informative. So, two totally different styles.

"Mind and Body," one of the "Doctor Stories," starts off with the point of view of the patient, a married woman in her early 40s. I have pains here, in my stomach, she tells the reader. She decides to see Dr. Williams. In the first six paragraphs, she describes her complaints and office visit using the pronoun "I" to refer to herself, and "he" to Dr. Williams. Then in paragraph seven "I" is suddenly Dr. Williams. Below are paragraphs six and seven.⁶



And what do you think he said to me? He said that what I needed was a man. What do you think of that? I told him I had a man at home, and a very good one. What do you think I have, a cancer? I bleed every once in a while. Tell me what you think. I don't care if I die. Nothing frightens me. But I am tired of dealing with fools.

I ventured to ask her if she had tried Atropin and Luminal for her colitis. They're no good for me, she said. Everything works the opposite from what it does in anyone else. I take Atropin for a few days then it dries my mouth, makes me worse than I was before. Luminal does not quiet me, it keeps me awake. No, there is nothing in that, nothing in that.

Back and forth, the POV keeps changing, "I" sometimes being the patient and her POV, and sometimes Dr. Williams and his POV. You can figure this out, but for me, it required some rereading.

If Williams was unknown and submitted these stories today, would they be published? Doubtful. If he read his stories in a modern critique group, how would they be received? Probably not well. I can hear the comments.

"Carlos, you keep changing point of view."
"Carlos, you don't have any quotation marks."
"Carlos, thoughts should be in italics."
And so on.

Used unwisely, unconventional prose – alternating POV, no quotation marks, mixing thoughts with dialogue – can trash your story. But Williams is just one of several famous writers who ignored the common rules and whom critics praise today. (Another is Edward Abbey, profiled in a later chapter.)

So, what's my point? Just this. I think Williams knew exactly what he was doing, and purposely wrote this way. The more I reread these paragraphs, the more I realized, *hey, this is pretty good, an interesting way to tell us about his patient.*

If you are in control and know your purpose, ignoring some common rules of writing can enliven many a paragraph.

Often, beginning writers are too bound by the "rules of writing," which I will comment more about later in the book.

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1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Physician_writer
 2. *Spring and All*, New Directions; Facsimile edition, 2011
 3. “*Something Urgent I Have to Say to You*”: *The Life and Works of William Carlos Williams*, by Herbert Leibowitz. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011
 4. <https://www.pulitzer.org/winners/william-carlos-williams>
 5. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/entertainment/books/1982/01/03/the-poet-from-paterson-a-detailed-life/12f932d5-48bd-4df6-bb3a-228dc032bb53/>
 6. *William Carlos Williams: The Doctor Stories, Compiled by Robert Coles*. New Directions, 1984.

Arterial Blood Gases

From writing *Pulmonary Physiology in Clinical Practice*, and giving many lectures on the subject, I knew I could explain arterial blood gases in a way not taught in medical schools. It's just one lab test, and few professors are interested enough to properly emphasize its importance to medical students

The test is vitally important in taking care of the sickest patients, those in intensive care units. Proper care requires understanding changes in the patient's oxygen and carbon dioxide levels, and blood acidity.

I saw the key to interpreting the test numbers as basically understanding four simple equations. To jazz up the material, I called them "The Four Most Important Equations in Clinical Medicine." Wow! The four most important equations are all in *my* field. That should attract some attention.

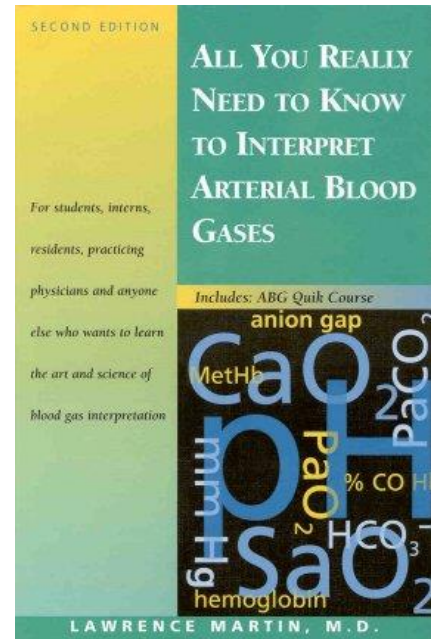
I wrote the book on this theme and sent it out to medical publishers (not Mosby, of course). A major medical publisher, Lea & Febiger, took it. No problem, no hassle. The book came out in 1992: *All You Really Need to Know to Interpret Arterial Blood Gases*.

It was an instant success, sold widely, and the publisher asked for a new edition in 1999. By that time Lea & Febiger had been folded into Lippincott Williams and Wilkins. (The cover photo shown is of the second edition.)

A few years later, Lippincott was bought out by Wolters Kluwer (WK), a German publishing giant. WK never asked for a new edition, probably for a couple of reasons. Lippincott no longer existed, so likely no one at WK was aware of the book except as just another catalog entry. Also, the second edition continued to sell worldwide. To this day I still receive royalty payments, averaging about \$500 a year. Medical students, at least those who want to know more about blood gases, love the book. It has been translated into Japanese, French, and Hindi.

In 2005 I got a call at home from an Indian physician, Dr. Satish Deopujari. (He was connected to my home phone via the hospital switchboard.) He introduced himself as a pediatrician in Nagpur, India, and said he was organizing a conference on pulmonary medicine for 2006, and wanted me to speak there. All expenses would be paid, including coach airplane tickets for me and my wife.

I remember the conversation well, and my first reaction was: "Are you sure you have the right Dr. Martin? Are you looking for Dr. Richard Martin?" The other Dr. Martin, a pediatric pulmonologist and full professor at CWRU, was much more academically entrenched than me.

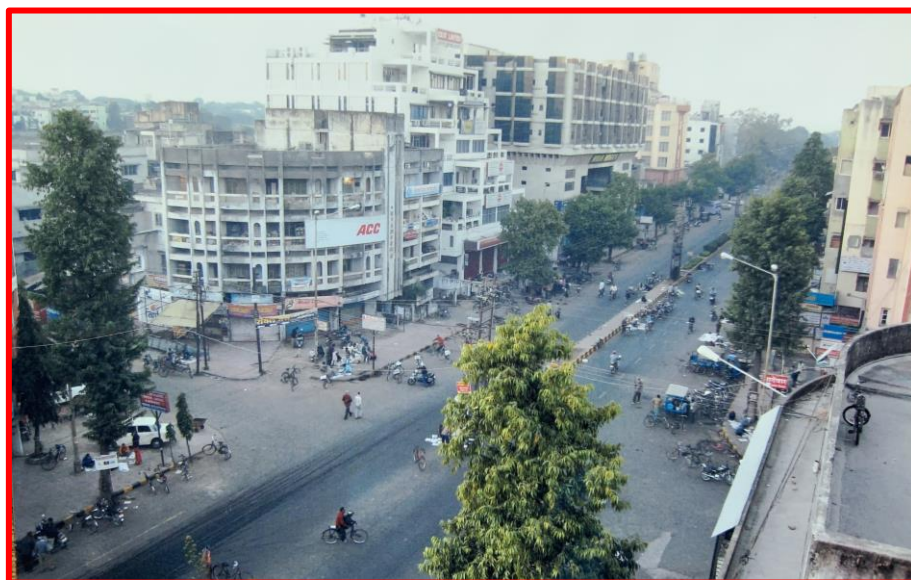


“No, I have the right Dr. Martin,” he replied. “I want you to come.” He explained that that “blood gases” was a strong area of interest, and he had read my book. Had the book been self-published, I doubt Dr. Deopujari would ever have seen it.

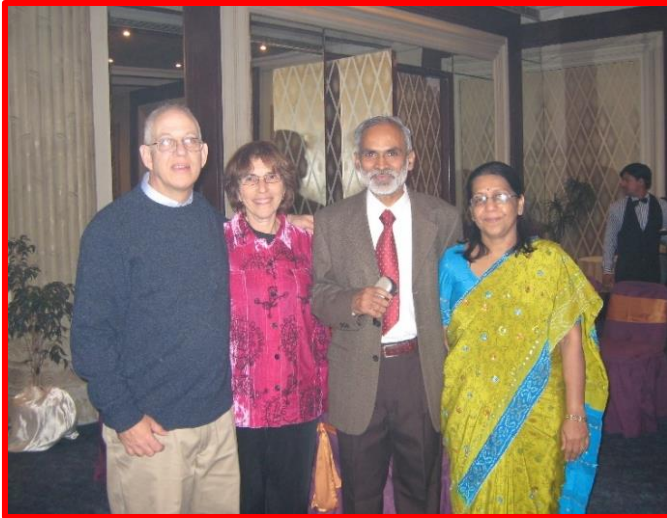
One great advantage of having a traditional publisher is that your book has a chance to be widely distributed.

In 2006 Ruth and I traveled to Nagpur, flying from Cleveland to Newark, then Newark to Delhi. That overseas flight took fourteen hours! Ugh! Two other American physicians, both pediatricians, were also invited and on the same flight with their wives. In Delhi, we were all met by Dr. Deopujari, who then escorted us on the short flight to Nagpur (see map).

I had never heard of Nagpur before the invitation. A “small” Indian city of about 2.5 million people, it seemed so different from a similar-sized U.S. city, such as Nashville or Tampa: very crowded sidewalks; few tall buildings; cows and motorized three-wheel vehicles sharing the streets; and monkeys playing in the parks. The photo below shows a view of Nagpur from our hotel.

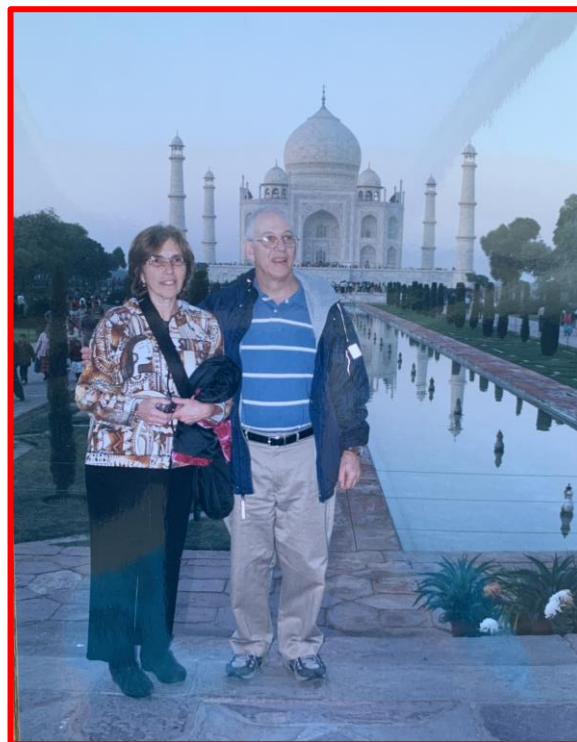


We loved it. Dr. Deopujari was a wonderful host. We met his wife and daughters, and got a good taste of part of India that most American tourists never see. The picture shows Ruth and I with Dr. Deopujari and his wife Sandhya. Sandhya is also a physician.



While Satish and I were at the conference, Sandhya took Ruth and some other non-attendees on a tour around Nagpur, including a visit to a psychiatric hospital, which Ruth found fascinating.

After the Nagpur medical conference, Ruth and I spent several days touring Delhi and other parts of northern India, including a visit to the Taj Mahal in Agra. The Taj is such an iconic structure that a photo of us by the reflecting pool, building in the background, almost looks like it was photoshopped. It was taken during our visit there December 2006.



Dr. Deopujari invited me back to India in 2008, this time to a medical conference in Bhopal. After that conference, Ruth and I toured Mumbai and the southern state of Kerala, famous for its backwater canals on which travel houseboats catering to tourists. We spent a delightful 24 hours on one of them.

I could write a book on just these two India trips, what we saw and experienced in this endlessly fascinating, third-world country. One experience in Mumbai, an encounter with a begging woman, did result in a short story, which I'll present in a later chapter. If you're a writer, just consider:

You never know where your writing will take you.

These trips would never have occurred but for my blood gas book and the courtesy of Dr. Deopujari.

Postscript

The Japanese invitation in 1993 that came about because of my physiology textbook, followed by the two trips to India in 2006 and 2008, sensitized me to the importance of having your book widely distributed. A random encounter with a book can change someone's life, or at least lead to new opportunities or areas of interest. Here are two well-known such encounters, followed by two of my own.

- In 2008 Lin-Manuel Miranda happened to come upon Ron Chernow's biography of Alexander Hamilton in an airport bookstore. He read it on vacation, and that led to his creating the Broadway hit musical *Hamilton*.
- Astronaut Scott Kelly was a mediocre student, aimless career-wise, until he read *The Right Stuff* by Tom Wolfe. In Kelly's autobiographical book *Endurance*, he credits Wolfe's book with inspiring him to excel. For the first time in his life, he began studying hard. He became a navy jet pilot, then one of NASA's top astronauts. Kelly and Cosmonaut Mikhail Kornienko lived aboard the International Space Station for 340 days (March 27, 2015 - March 2, 2016), setting an ISS record up to that point.
- During the Covid lockdown in October 2020, while visiting family in Hastings-on-Hudson, New York, I happened to see a Zoom presentation by author James Kaplan on his new book, *Irving Berlin: New York Genius*. How this led to my writing about Berlin is discussed in Part II, "[Trips during Covid – Meeting Irving Berlin](#)."
- After a visit to Arches National Park in 2021, I found a nonfiction book in the Visitor's Center by one Edward Abbey, titled *Desert Solitaire*. Abbey worked at Arches as a ranger in the 1950s. I had never heard of him or the book, though among environmentalists both were apparently quite well known. (Abbey died in 1989.) Abbey's writing intrigued me, more so when I learned he was also a rules-breaking fiction writer. Seven of his books later, I knew he had to be one of my profiled authors in this memoir ([in Part II](#)).

Postscript

As soon as I created my website, www.lakesidepress.com, and learned how to program in HTML, I posted blood gas information on the internet, where it remains to this day. “The Four Most Important Equations” page dates from 1996, four years after the blood gas book was published.

<http://www.lakesidepress.com/pulmonary/papers/eq/tablecontents.html>.

THE FOUR MOST IMPORTANT EQUATIONS IN CLINICAL PRACTICE

[Lawrence Martin, M.D., FACP, FCCP](#)
Clinical Associate Professor of Medicine
Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine
Cleveland, Ohio

Janet Opal Asimov (1926 – 2019)

There are many great and/or well-known women fiction writers: Mary Shelley, George Sand, Louisa May Alcott, Agatha Christie, JK Rowling, Danielle Steele, Toni Morrison (Nobel Prize), Joyce Carol Oates, Margaret Mitchell, and Harper Lee, to name just a few.

There are not many women doctor fiction writers, at least known to me. Wikipedia lists some five dozen female medical writers, the vast majority of the profiles mentioning only nonfiction works. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Women_medical_writers

One reason, perhaps the major reason for relatively few women doctor fiction writers (compared to men) is the paucity of women physicians throughout the 19th and most of the 20th century. My medical school class of 55 had just 5 women graduating in 1969. Ruth's medical school class of 256 had only 17 women graduating in 1971.

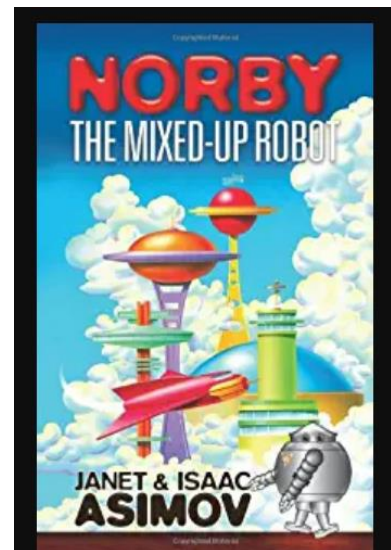
Gradually, since the 1970s, more and more women applied and were accepted into medical school, so that in the 2020s slightly over 50% of U.S. medical students are women. I have no doubt that over time, we will see more women physicians taking up the writing craft and achieving fame.

Janet Asimov, nee Jeppson, earned a B.A. degree from Stanford University and her M.D. degree from New York University Medical School in 1952. She then completed a residency in psychiatry at Bellevue Hospital. In 1960 she graduated from the William Alanson White Institute of Psychoanalysis, where she continued to work until 1986.

She began writing fiction before she first met Isaac Asimov in 1970. Her first published writing was a “mystery short” that appeared in the May 1966 issue of *The Saint Mystery Magazine*.

Janet and Isaac saw each other often starting in 1970, when Isaac separated from his first wife. They married November 30, 1973, two weeks after Asimov's divorced was finalized. On the day of their wedding, Janet received notice that her novel, *The Second Experiment*, was accepted for publication by Houghton Mifflin, under her maiden name; it came out in 1974.

After her marriage she continued to practice psychiatry and psychoanalysis under her maiden name Jeppson, and publish medical papers under that name.

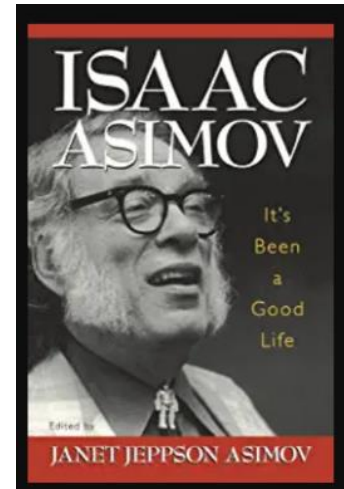


As Mrs. Asimov, her writing took two paths: a collection of stories for children, co-authored with her very famous husband, titled the Norby series (11 books altogether); and novels, three under her own name and three under her married name.

According to Isaac Asimov, the books that Janet wrote in association with him were “90 percent” hers. His name was wanted on the books by the publisher, he states in his autobiography, “for the betterment of sales.” Janet Asimov retired from the private practice of psychiatry in 1986 at age 60, and continued her long writing career.

After Isaac's death in 1992, she took on the writing of his syndicated popular-science column in the *Los Angeles Times*. Her last two published books were nonfiction about her husband's life: *It's Been a Good Life* (2002) and *Notes for a Memoir: On Isaac Asimov, Life, and Writing* (2006). She died in 1919, age 92. An obituary is online at

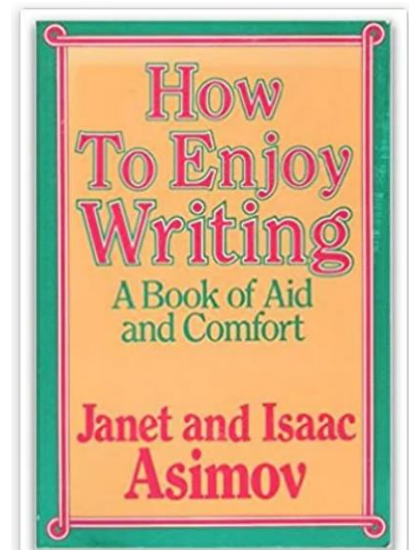
https://thehumanist.com/news/aha_news/in-memoriam-janet-jeppson-asimov-1926-2019/



There is no doubt Janet Asimov is more well-known than if all her writing had been under her maiden name Jeppson. There is also no doubt she was an accomplished writer, and able to combine a medical career with her output of books for the general public. In the third volume of his autobiography, Isaac Asimov writes, after mentioning his wife's novels:

“...her favorite book is one called *How to Enjoy Writing* published by Walker in 1987. It is a collection of writings about writing (many by me) together with comments by Janet. It is really one of the most charming books I have ever read.”

I previously wrote that beginning writers should read two essential books about writing: Stephen King's *On Writing* and Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style*. Beyond those two, there are dozens of books about the craft that beseech your attention. If you are a fan of Isaac Asimov's style then you might find this little tome interesting. I did. The book is available on Amazon.

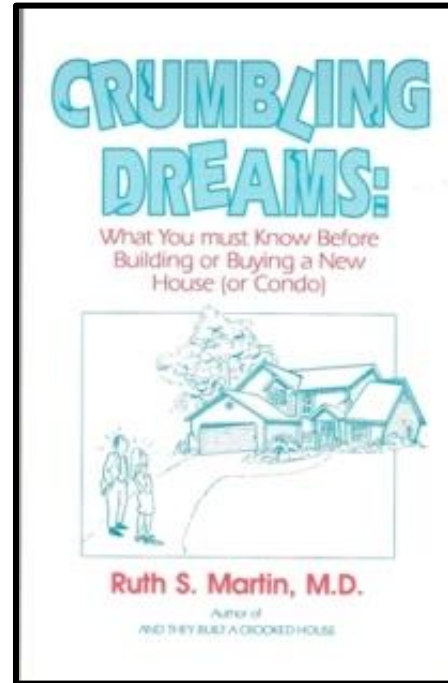


Crumbling Dreams

While working on *Pickwickian* and the blood gas book, I couldn't get the house debacle out of my mind. I yearned to make something useful out of it.

By 1992 I had accumulated a large amount of information about cases of defective new-house construction. Surely, people planning to build a new house would be interested in what I had learned. I thus decided to write a second book on the subject, *Crumbling Dreams: What You Must Know Before Building or Buying a New House (or Condo)*. For reasons listed in the *Crooked House* chapter, I again put Ruth as the sole author.

This was no slap-dash effort, but a carefully thought-out follow-up to *Crooked House*. I included some background about our construction nightmare, then several examples of other screwed-over home buyers: "True stories from all over the country." And advice: "How to prevent a nightmare from developing with your new home." To help distinguish this from just another generic "how to" book, I put in Section 3, Ruth's explanation of why the bad guys always seem to win.



Crumbling Dreams: What You Must Know Before Building or Buying a New House (or Condo)

Ruth S. Martin, M.D.

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I did not look for a traditional publisher. If *Crooked House* couldn't find one, I figured neither would *Crumbling Dreams*. The book came out in 1993. Same printer. Same publisher. Same result. Absent any sales, I put the book online in 1996.

<http://www.lakesidepress.com/dreams/contents.html>

Would Larry ever learn? Eventually, yes. Other book ideas that arose from our construction saga died aborning, as I'll discuss in Part II.

By the middle of 1994, I was up to six books, three traditionally-published, and three self-published under Lakeside Press. I had completed a seventh book, about scuba diving, that had not yet found a publisher. At the time I was communicating with Best Publishing, a company that specialized in scuba books.

I was fairly prolific, for a medical doctor, but except for the blood gas book, unsuccessful in terms of sales. And of course, the blood gas book was for a very narrow audience. Here is what I wrote in my diary in October 1994 (quoted exactly as written).

October 2, 1994

I suppose I should start a book for big bucks. Look at the frustration I've had after writing seven books aimed at small or non-existent markets.

- 1) Breathe Easy - tiny market, no publicity by Prentice Hall - Lost Money
- 2) Pulm. Physiology - disaster marketing by Mosby - probably broke even since I had to pay for pictures.
- 3) Crooked House - self-pub.; market never materialized; lost money
- 4) Crumbling Dreams - same
- 5) Pickwickian - same
- 6) Blood Gas book - only "money maker" of the lot; hardly a blockbuster.
- 7) Scuba Book - no matter what happens, unlikely to sell more than a few hundred copies a year; even if it sells a thousand copies a year, say through Best, that is not a lot of money considering the time and effort I put into it.

What do all these books have in common? Well-written, a labor of love, and small potential markets! I actually thought the markets would be larger, but without any publisher to push them, even if there is a larger market, there is no way to reach it. So my next book must be well-written and a labor of love, but aimed at a larger market. Which means, probably, fiction.

It is amusing to look back at this complaint about money, as if that was my true goal. I had a decent income and clearly wasn't writing these books to "make money."

At the time self-publishing was not all that common, but since then, with the advent of the internet and Amazon, the number of self-published authors has grown into the millions. It should be obvious to any sentient author that "making money" cannot be the reason so many have joined the fray.

When you account for the expenses incurred, very few people make money writing and self-publishing books.

Take away the "self" and the statement is probably still true, perhaps with the modifier "much" before "money."

In retrospect, my 1994 lamentation was not really about money. *It was about not being read.* About unrequited effort. Income was just a proxy for the fact that what I thought was good stuff was going unrecognized and unappreciated. *That* is the writer's lament. If the main goal of all self-published authors was to "make money," we would be better off spending our time as Walmart greeters or bus drivers.

So, what are the other reasons? Why do so many people spend untold hours writing for publication? I will address this question in my chapter on "The Good News and Bad News about Self-publishing."

This discussion brings me to a recurring joke. Every time I published a book, and brought home a copy to show Ruth, she had the same one-liner offered after the customary congratulations. "Larry, keep your day job."

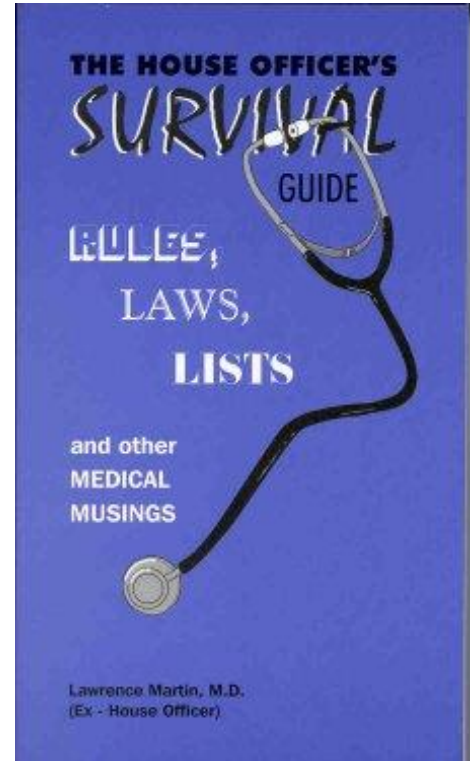
The House Officer's Survival Guide

On teaching rounds with house officers (interns and residents), I was known for making up rules, laws, and lists. For example, one of my favorite laws, repeated often on rounds, was “money not spent on the terminally ill will not go to feed hungry children.”

Hospitals spend about half of Medicare money on the terminally ill, or people in the last six months of life. Ethical discussions always followed when we had such patients in the intensive care unit. Everyone knew the case was hopeless, but here we were, expending huge resources. So, to reassure the trainees that the money spent wasn't depriving kids of food, I always quoted my “law.”

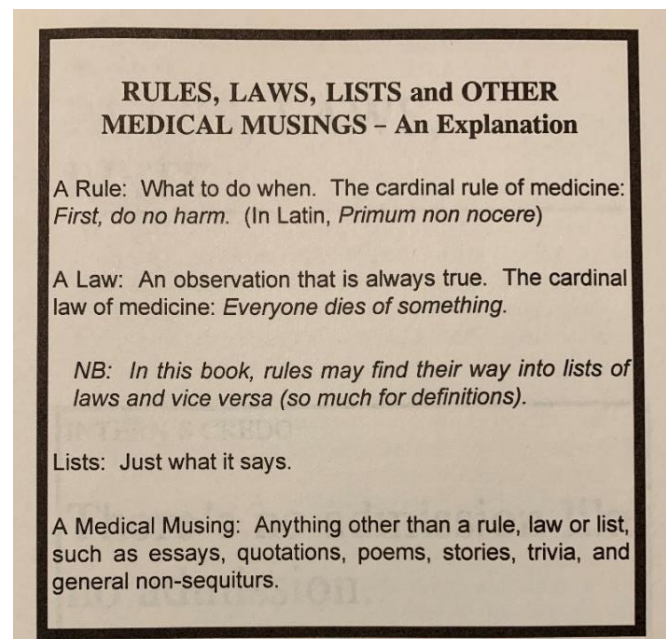
I had other pithy teachings, about reading chest x-rays, implementing “do not resuscitate” orders, law vs. medicine, and the Hippocratic Oath.

I offered so many “lists” and “laws” in teaching rounds that I decided just to collect them all into book form, and add additional information that should interest our trainees.



The House Officers Survival Guide: Rules, Laws, Lists and other Medical Musings was published in 1996 – by Lakeside Press, of course. Unlike my other paperbacks, I sized this one at 4.5 x 7.5 inches, small enough to easily fit into a doctor's white coat pocket: 180 small pages.

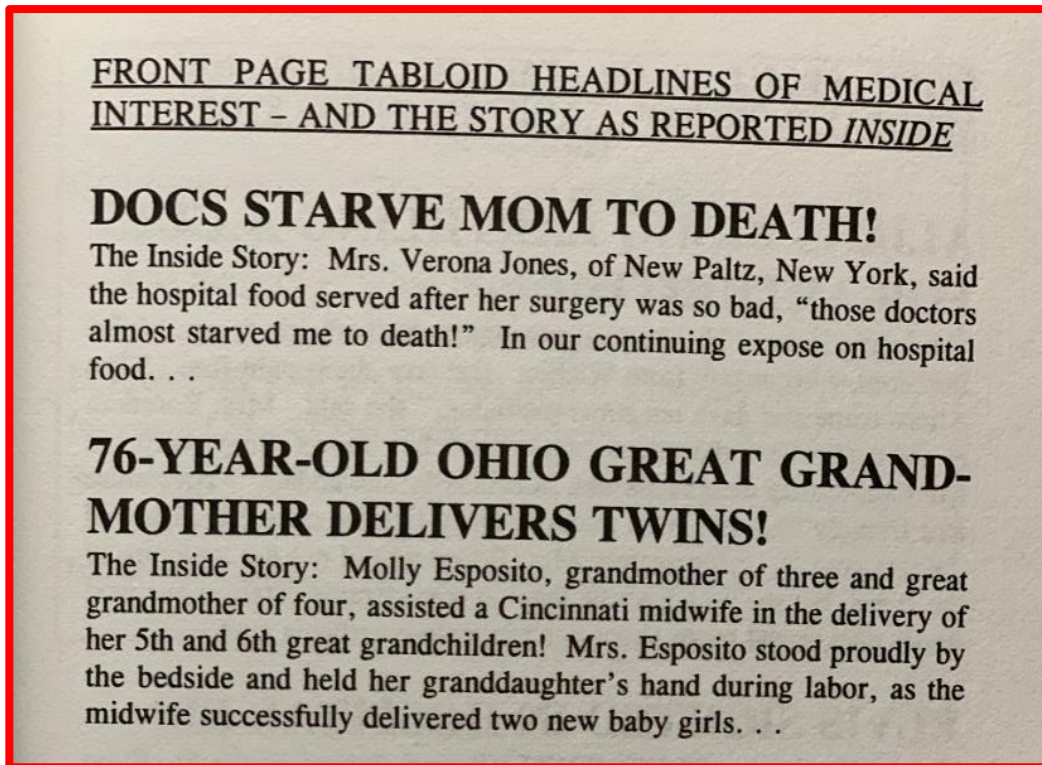
In the book, I make clear my rather arbitrary definitions, shown in this screenshot.



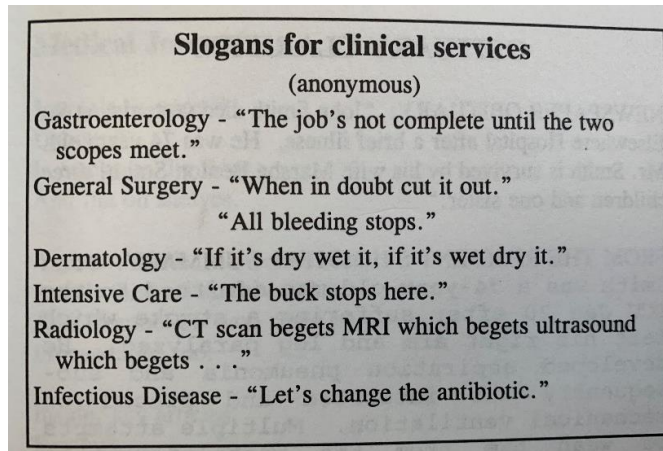
Sometimes I call my statements “truisms,” as in the following list of “Six Medical Truisms.” (Regarding fax machines and medical records, keep in mind this was the mid-1990s.)

1. Not all asthmatics wheeze. However, finding a dyspneic asthmatic “without wheezing” usually means the patient was not auscultated during forced expiration.
2. Daily weights are seldom accurate because no one pays for them. A “weight service” that could charge per patient would maintain the scales and provide accurate daily weights.
3. Chronic complainers, hypochondriacs, and Munchausen patients can contract the same diseases as everyone else.
4. The most underrated piece of medical equipment is the fax machine.
5. American hospitals have 19th-century record-keeping systems because they spend 19th-century dollars on the problem.
6. An on-time patient deserves an on-time doctor.

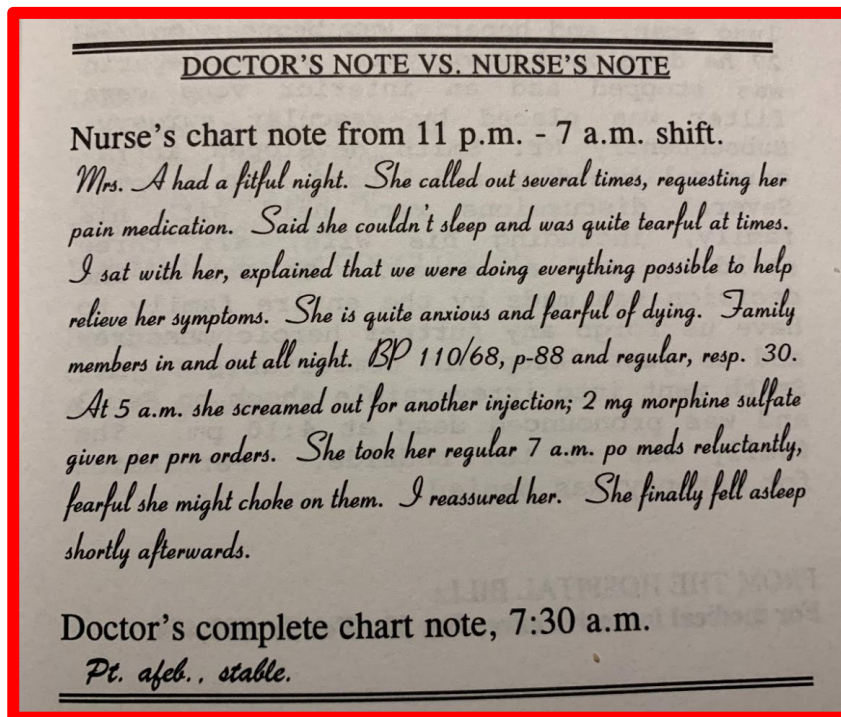
For some humor, I also took a jab at tabloids and their misleading headlines.



I put in some slogans that could be used for our clinical services.



I also put in a jab at doctors' cryptic chart notes.



Another section points out the ambiguity of common patient chart abbreviations. They often appear in doctors' notes without clarifying what condition the abbreviation represents. Here is one example from the book.

MS

- Mitral stenosis
- Morphine sulfate
- Multiple stab wounds
- Mental status
- Meshuga student

(Choose appropriate term in context, e.g., “this 24-year-old ms” would be “meshuga student”; this 24-year-old with ms would be mitral stenosis unless you see knives sticking out; and “this 24-year-old with abnormal ms” would be “mental status,” unless of course you think the term “with abnormal mitral stenosis” is good English.)

In the next example, the chart abbreviation “CRF” usually means “chronic renal failure.” But I list other possibilities for C, R and F, some obviously absurd. My goal was to sensitize house officers to be wary of disease abbreviations.

CRF

chronic/continuous/constant/crippling/costly
renal/respiratory/relapsing/recrudescent/ridiculous
failure/fame/famine/foolishness/fetishism

Another entry in my list of abused abbreviations is “HEENT WNL” to mean “head, eyes, ears, nose, and throat are within normal limits.” However, this abbreviation is used so glibly that I offer a different, and probably more accurate, interpretation: “HEENT -- not examined.”

Survival Guide contains a lot of serious material as well, e.g., about pulmonary physiology, chest x-ray interpretation, taking a medical history, conflicts between the legal and medical professions, performing cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

Overall, I designed the book to be a mixture of humor, medical advice, and information on the liberal arts, especially writing and music. A section titled “A Literary Bent” includes a list of some doctors famous for their fiction or poetry: Anton Chekhov, Robin Cook, Michael Crichton, Arthur Conan Doyle, Somerset Maugham, and William Carlos Williams.

The literary section also has a page titled “Three Modern Novels Recommended to House Officers,” with the following preface: “This is ridiculously presumptuous, I know, like recommending just three paintings, symphonies or movies. Still, these three post-WWII novels seem to strike a responsive chord among most young doctors who read them.” I then list the books, and provide a short blurb for each.

House of God, by Samuel Shem, M.D. A best-selling 1974 novel about one bright intern’s year at MBH (Man’s Best Hospital, aka Massachusetts General Hospital). Written by a practicing psychiatrist, the black humor in the novel still rings true today.

Catch-22, by Joseph Heller. A brilliant, black-comedy masterpiece published in 1955 and in continuous print since. Set in the Mediterranean during WW II, *Catch-22* touches on psychiatric aspects of fighting and not fighting. What is *Catch-22*? If you try to get out of the military during wartime by professing insanity, you are making a rational and therefore a sane decision; ergo, you are not crazy, and your request must be denied,

Atlas Shrugged, by Ayn Rand. Rand (1905-1982), 1920s émigré from the Soviet Union, is perhaps most famous for her 1943 novel *The Fountainhead* (also made into a 1949 movie starring Gary Cooper and Patricia Neal). *Atlas Shrugged*, published in 1957, is considered her magnum opus; in over a thousand pages she lays out her strongly anti-collectivist and pro-laissez-faire philosophy.

The House Officer's Survival Guide was not intended for the general public, nor was it written for established physicians: just for house officers. Except for one small ad in a medical journal geared to house officers, I made no attempt to market the book. (I recall receiving an order from the Mayo Clinic for a few books, but that was all.) My goal was just to give it to young doctors training in Mt. Sinai Hospital, where I worked. It was great to have the book available for each new class of trainees.

Have an idea for a book you just want to distribute to family or close associates? It can be any size, any length, on any subject – one of the advantages of “self-publishing.”

Postscript

The House Officer's Survival Guide is perhaps the most visible reminder of my teaching efforts while at Mt. Sinai Hospital. Fifteen years before it came out, I was invited to run the second-year pulmonary physiology course at Case Western Reserve University's medical school, with which our hospital was closely affiliated. This was a two-week block during which the students were exposed to the most important aspects pulmonary physiology, including blood gases, lung function testing, and oxygen therapy I assembled the syllabus, arranged for the lectures with Case faculty, and of course gave a few of my own. I did this job for five years, and enjoyed every minute of it. At the time I was receiving a hospital stipend from Mt. Sinai, and in this regard the hospital was subsidizing the medical school. The only “payment” from the medical school was free parking during the course!

I continued to give lectures at the medical school, but otherwise all my teaching efforts were focused at Mt. Sinai. During the 1980s and early 1990s I ran a ‘World Class Quiz in Pulmonary Medicine,’ distributed to all the residents and interns in the medicine department. It was multiple choice and easy to enter, though correct answers required some digging. In addition to a small monetary award, Ruth and I took the top three winners – along with their spouse or significant other – out to dinner at a nice restaurant.

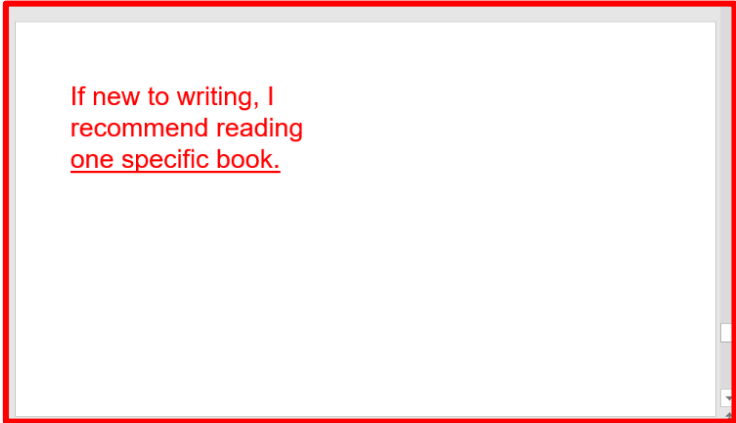
Then of course there were multiple house staff lectures, and those information-laden teaching rounds discussed at the beginning of this chapter. The first chapter of my ICU stories book (*Pickwickian*, in a previous chapter, and two other editions, presented later) is titled “Rounds.” The dialogue in that story is just as I remember it: pedantic, with a sense of humor.

All this effort did not go unappreciated, as I received several faculty teaching awards and (after 2000) achieved the rank of clinical professor of medicine at the medical school.

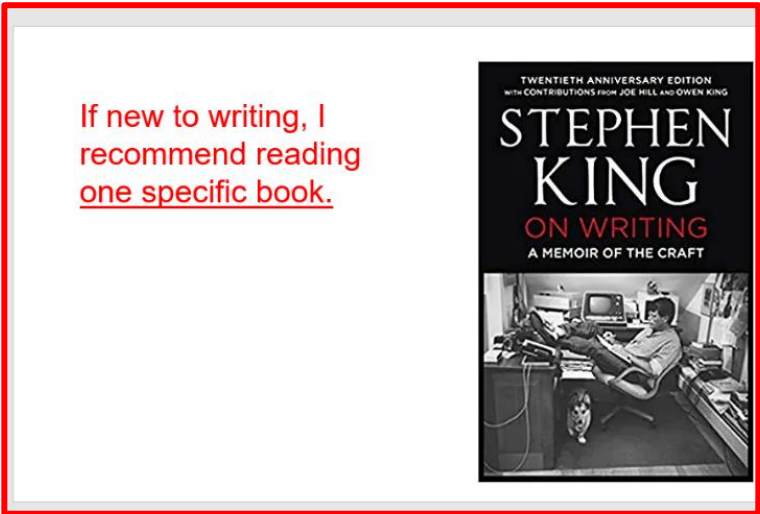
Stephen King (b. 1947)

I am not a great fan of Stephen King’s novels, simply because horror fiction is not a favorite genre. I read “The Stand,” “Misery,” and some of his short stories, and watched movies of “The Shining,” “Carrie,” and “Misery.” Jack Nicholson, by the way, is amazing in “The Shining.” Because the main characters in the Stanley Kubrick movie are portrayed very differently from the novel, King very much disliked the adaptation. <https://www.slashfilm.com/782506/why-stephen-king-hated-stanley-kubricks-adaptation-of-the-shining-so-much/>.

I *am* a fan of Stephen King’s 2020 book *On Writing*. It’s part memoir but mostly advice and counsel to the writer, clearer and more to the point than any other book I’ve read on the subject. Toward the end of my PowerPoint presentation on self-publishing, when interest may be waning just a bit, I show this slide and read the message on it.



I wait a few seconds. Then, anticipating what some in the audience may be thinking, I quip “It’s not one of mine.” That gets a little laugh. I then show the next slide, which puts the recommended book’s cover adjacent to my lead-in.



King's book is an important recommendation to new writers, for two reasons. One, it's a good book, with lots of useful advice. Two, without a firm recommendation, the beginner can get lost in a sea of titles, all purporting to teach the writing craft. Go to the Amazon search bar and type in "Books About Writing." You get a multitude. Where does one begin?

King pulls no punches on the overall usefulness of books about writing:

...most books about writing are filled with bullshit...One notable exception is *The Elements of Style*, by William Strunk and E.B. White. There is little or no detectable bullshit in that book...every aspiring writer should read *The Elements of Style*. (Second Foreword, *On Writing*)

The original *Elements* was written by William Strunk Jr. in 1918, and comprised eight "elementary rules of usage," ten "elementary principles of composition," "a few matters of form," a list of 49 "words and expressions commonly misused," and a list of 57 "words often misspelled."

The "Strunk and White" we are familiar with dates from 1959 when E. B. White greatly enlarged and revised the book for publication. In 2011 Time Magazine named *The Elements of Style* one of the 100 best and most influential books written in English since 1923.

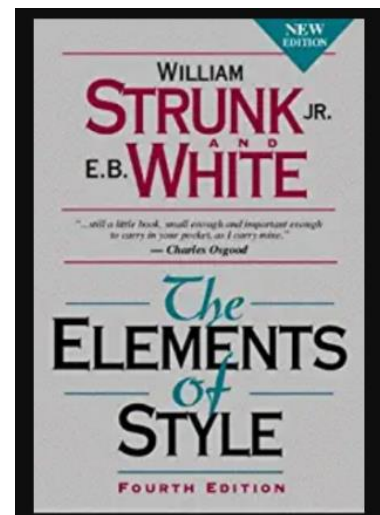
So there you have it. Two books about writing. I discovered them years ago, refer to them often, and emphasize both in my talks on self-publishing.

Back to King. His book gives a review of the tools one needs to be a competent writer. These include wide vocabulary, good grammar, use of active verbs, and avoidance of adverbs. He then writes:

I am approaching the heart of this book with two theses, both simple. The first is that good writing consists of mastering the fundamentals (vocabulary, grammar, the elements of style) ... The second is that while it is impossible to make a competent writer out of a bad writer, and while it is equally impossible to make a great writer out of a good one, it is possible with lots of hard work, dedication, and timely help, to make a good writer out of a merely competent one. (p. 142, *On Writing*)

In the final analysis, King's overarching advice is this:

If you want to be a writer, you must do two things above all others: read a lot and write a lot. There's no way around these two things that I'm aware of, no shortcut. (p. 145, *On Writing*)



Outdoor Activities: Sailing, Golf, Scuba, Hiking

Sailing, golf, and scuba, and hiking occurred in that order. They started as near-obsessions, and two of the activities lead to books.

Began learning to sail 1983, age 40

Certified in scuba 1989; two books published about scuba diving.

Started playing golf 1993, age 50; interest resulted in one on-line book and multiple websites.

Joined Cleveland Hiking Club 2003, age 60; began taking vacations focused on hiking

Growing up in Savannah, our family had no discretionary money. Not poor, just no money to pursue any remotely expensive activity. I played a lot of softball and rubber ball, went to miniature golf courses a few times, and did a lot of swimming in the summer. But sailing, golf, and scuba? Never on my radar.

That all changed in Cleveland, and in its time each sport became a focus of vacations, with the first three almost an obsession. For sailing, then scuba, then golf, I read a lot and took lessons. I was not a dilettante. There was hard effort and not a small sum spent to become at least proficient in these three activities. For hiking, I already knew how to walk, but after joining the Cleveland Hiking Club we began to explore regional and national parks, an activity that has continued well into retirement.

We gave up sailing because the expense wasn't worth the limited opportunity on Lake Erie. We gave up scuba diving only because of our age. And we still play golf, albeit only on 9-hole courses.

Sailing

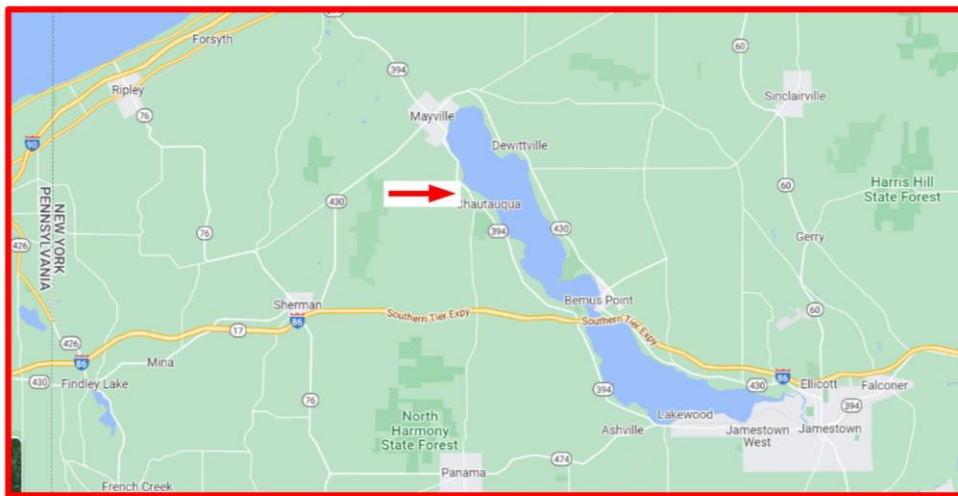
While vacationing with my family at the Chautauqua Institute in western New York, I often took out a Sunfish sailboat on beautiful Lake Chautauqua. It's a small one-sail boat (see picture), great for the beginner to learn basic skills. And it's quiet, which I liked; I never considered getting a motor boat.

I decided to buy a sailboat and in the winter of 1981 my wife Ruth and I went to the Cleveland Boat Show. Since the show is held indoors, you don't get to test out the boat. I bought a 20-foot Highlander sailboat – not appreciating that it is built for racing and can be difficult to control in windy conditions, or that it's best sailed with two people. For someone at my level at the time, whose goal was simple day sailing and not racing, it was the wrong boat. Below is a picture from the Highlander website, <http://www.sailhighlander.org/>.





The following summer we trailered the Highlander to the Chautauqua Institute and kept it on Chautauqua Lake during our two-week stay. No more Sunfish; now I had a real sailboat. The lake is one-two miles wide and seventeen miles long, ideal for day sailing (see map). I went out with our oldest daughter Joanna one windy afternoon, and while tacking (changing direction), the large main sail caught the wind in such a way that the boat almost tipped over. I knew then it was the wrong boat for me and decided, a la *Jaws*, that I needed “a bigger boat.”



Lake Chautauqua, New York. Arrow indicates location of Chautauqua Institute

Ruth was also learning to sail, and I realized that to get serious with the sport, we needed one we could potentially live aboard for a few days. At the next boat show we settled on the popular 27-foot Catalina, which we kept for the next seven summers. In honor of my first book, I named the boat *Breathe Easy*. (See below for pictures of the boat.)

To learn to sail the bigger boat, I went out with friends, took several Coast Guard courses on tacking and navigation, and of course read many books. My favorite was a sailor’s personal memoir, *Sailing Alone Around the World*, by Joshua Slocum. Highly recommended if you have any interest in sailing. Alone. Anywhere.

The picture on the left is a stock photo of the Catalina-27. The middle picture is me on the deck of *Breathe Easy* in Rondeau Bay, Canada. The picture on the right shows the boat docked there, with the name “Breathe Easy” on the transom.



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catalina_27

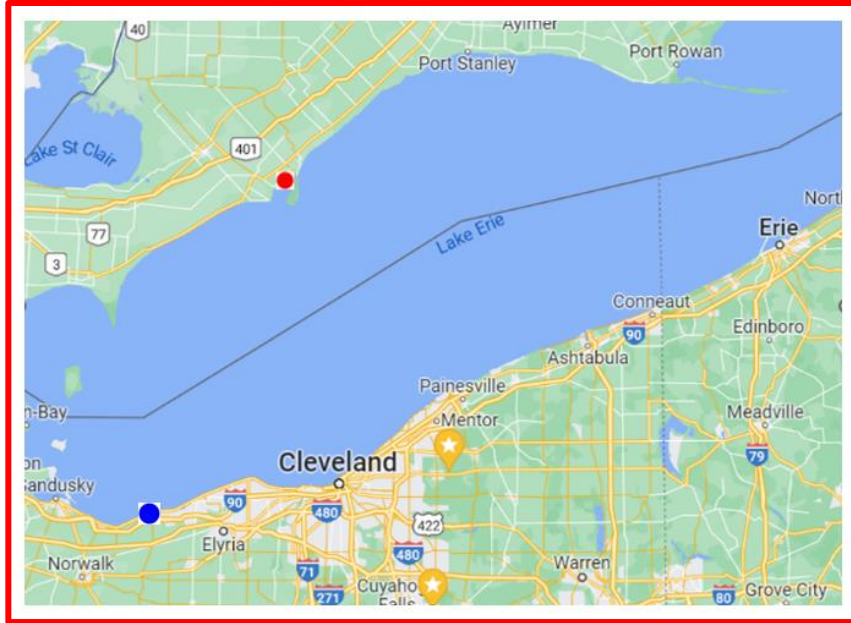


I never felt competent to write a book about sailing. No matter how much I read and studied, I recognized my modest level of proficiency. That is also true about golf and music, brand new interests that I did write about. Why the difference? We owned the Catalina in the 1980s, when I was very involved writing medical books. The other subjects caught my interest much later, when I felt the urge to branch out in my writing. Also, my writing about golf and music was strictly non-commercial, with only internet postings; it helped me to learn the subjects and perhaps teach others something useful.

Sailing on Lake Erie, where the Catalina was docked at Lakeside Yacht Club (the origin of my publishing company name), was expensive – and often frustrating. The sailing season was only late May through September, and half the time there was either too much wind for comfortable day sailing, or almost none at all. Also, with our jobs, we could only sail on weekends.

In the late 1980s I did manage two trips across Lake Erie with two other guys, neither one an experienced sailor. We sailed forty-six nautical miles from Cleveland to Rondeau Bay, about nine hours each way (red dot on map, below). Each time we slept on the boat, and returned home the next morning.

To go through customs on arrival to Canada, all I had to do was pick up a phone at the dock, tell someone on the other end where we came from, our names and my boat’s name. Today, I imagine, it would not be so easy.



Traveling to Rondeau on the second trip, the weather was fine. The next day, heading back to Cleveland, we ran into a rainstorm about ten miles from shore. It gave me my first real “scare” at sea, for I had never before sailed in such weather. Part of the scare was because all decisions on what to do fell on me as “captain.” I estimated wind was about 15-20 mph and the rain was coming in at an angle. I stayed calm, but did briefly imagine a newspaper headline: “Three men lost at sea, Coast Guard is searching.” We took in the jib, reefed the main sail, and plowed on. I was never so relieved as when we sailed behind Lake Erie’s break wall into calm water.

To gain more overnight boating experience, Ruth and I sailed 43 miles from Cleveland to Vermillion, Ohio (blue dot in above map). This route kept us close to shore. We docked overnight at a local boat club. No one told us we were docked just yards from the train tracks. A whistle-blowing train came by every 15 minutes, so there was little sleep that night. Exhausted the next morning, we mostly motored home.

Apart from these overnight trips, sailing on *Breathe Easy* was just for an hour or two on weekend afternoons, out past the Lake Erie break wall and back. Our kids did go out a few times with us, but never developed any enthusiasm for the sport. Too confining.

Lakeside Yacht Club participated in low-key sailing races with other clubs, and we tried that once. Racing sailors are super obsessed and think nothing of sitting idly in their boats while waiting for a wisp of wind that never comes. Boring. For our race the wind oscillated between none and a very light breeze. We finally made it to the finish line. Dead last, as I recall.

Anyway, after seven summers sailing *Breathe Easy*, we gave it up. The old saying is so true: the happiest two days of a sailor’s life are when he gets his boat and when he sells his boat. The year we sold the boat, I entered into another water sport: scuba diving. Scuba physiology fit in nicely with my career as a lung doctor, and would lead me to write two more books.

Scuba Diving and Publication of *Scuba Diving Explained*

In 1989 I learned that a doctor friend had just become certified in scuba diving, and I decided to try it. Long story short: I loved it, and within a few weeks had done all the classroom work and the indoor pool dives needed toward certification. The final requirement was two open-water dives. That meant diving in a natural body of water, which could be a lake, sea, ocean...or quarry! Near Cleveland, there are water-filled quarries used for this “open water” diving. The water is cold and you need a thick wetsuit, but I did my required dives in one of them and became certified that way.

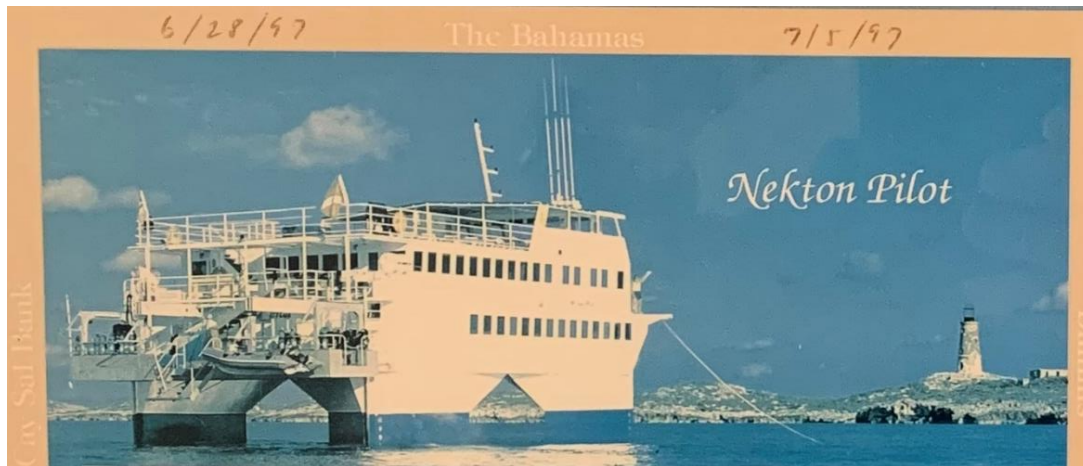
My wife Ruth also took the course and pool work but did not want to do quarry dives. Solution: our next vacation would be in the Bahamas, where she could complete her open-water dives. We flew to Nassau in 1990, and there she became a certified diver. The water temperature was a very comfortable 87 degrees.

Every year for the next decade Ruth and I did at least one diving vacation in the Caribbean. The allure of scuba diving was the amazing underwater wildlife, coupled with the feeling of free floating or weightlessness. Each dive lasts only 30-60 minutes, and recreational divers typically do only two-three dives in a 24-hour period. The new environment, plus camaraderie of fellow divers, made for great vacations.

For most of these vacations we stayed in a hotel on a tropical island, such as Grand Cayman. Then, each morning, a scuba dive boat took us out to the dive site. Once the boat moored, all the divers on board would typically do two underwater dives, the first one always deeper than the second, a standard procedure to prevent the bends or decompression sickness. The picture shows me helping Ruth climb aboard our dive boat after one of these dives.



We vacationed on what’s known as a liveaboard dive boat; as the name implies sleeping quarters and all meals are on the boat. This is more efficient for avid divers than staying in a hotel and motoring out to dive sites each day. A liveaboard can take you to many sites far from the island, and also give you the opportunity to do a night dive without having to return to your hotel. One of these boats was the Nekton Pilot, a large catamaran that had room for eight couples, plus the crew. Shown below is a picture of the boat that we vacationed on in 1997, plus two photos I took of creatures on a night dive.



For me, scuba diving was more than a vacation sport. It was *pulmonary physiology*. Learning about changes in blood oxygen and ambient pressures while diving fit right into my medical career. I joined Duke University's Divers Alert Network (DAN), and took courses on diving medicine, concentrating on issues in my area of pulmonology.

Should people with asthma not scuba dive? That was one of the controversial questions bandied about, and I read everything I could on the subject. What about diving when you are pregnant? Or after lung surgery? So many questions. I collected information to answer these and other medical issues related to diving. Then – of course! – I decided to write a book. The result was *Scuba Diving Explained: Questions and Answers on Physiology and Medical Aspects*.

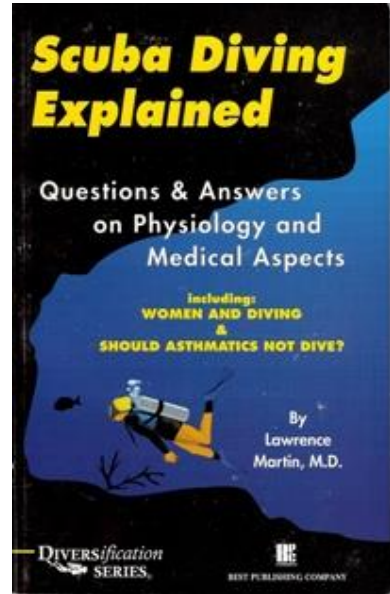
Professionally, *Scuba Diving Explained* fit my career as well as *Pulmonary Physiology in Clinical Practice*. The one big difference is that I wrote it for a general or lay audience.

I made several publishing queries but found the subject too narrow for traditional, mainstream publishers. The ideal publisher would be one that specialized in scuba books, and such a company existed: Best Publishing Company, in Tucson, AZ. Best liked the book, but

unlike traditional publishers, they required the author to cover the expense of publishing. In this case, it was \$5000 up front. Best assured me the book should sell and that I would recoup the expense, but of course there was no guarantee.

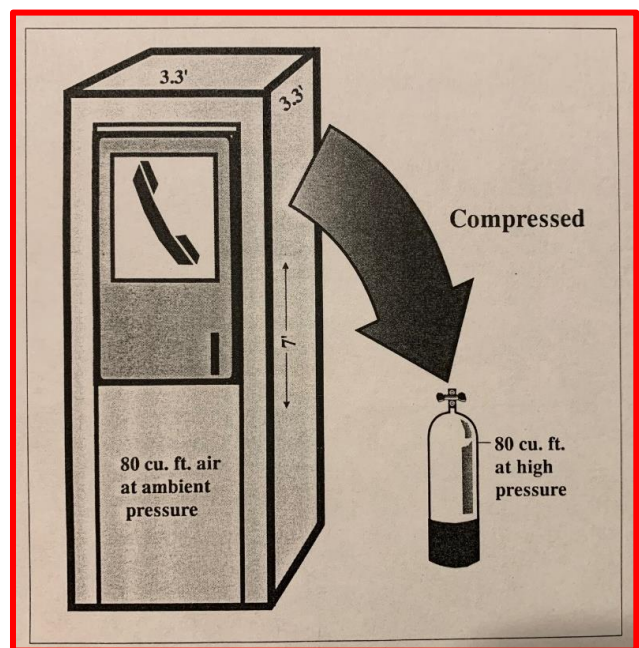
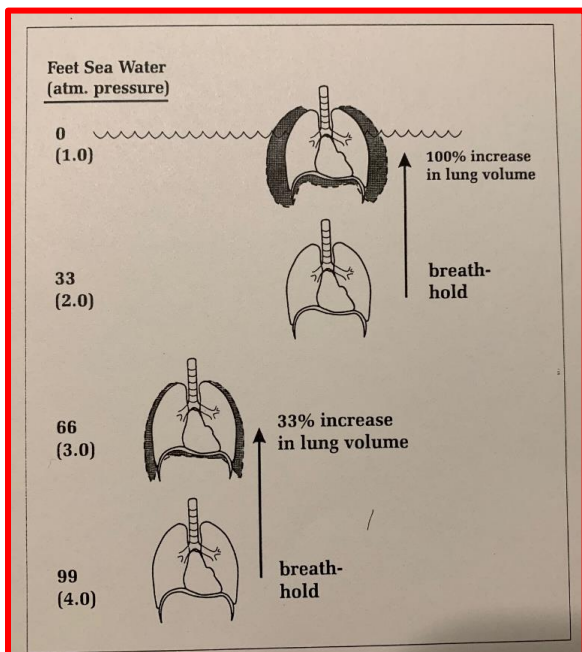
This was the mid-1990s, and I was aware of vanity publishing companies that did little more than print your book for a large fee. Investigation showed me that Best was not a vanity publisher. Their books were advertised heavily in scuba magazines and sold widely. I decided to take the chance and paid the \$5000. The book came out in 1997. To juice up interest I put “women and diving” and the asthma question on the cover.

Within a couple of years, I had received royalty payments that equaled and perhaps slightly exceeded the \$5000, so was overall pleased with the result. It was certainly gratifying to walk into a scuba shop and see my book for sale.



Before continuing with the publishing history of *Scuba Diving Explained*, I will outline my approach to the book, which I think accounted for much of its success.

My foremost goal was to explain basic underwater physiology in a clear manner. Added to the text were many diagrams, such as the ones below. The left diagram shows how lungs expand when you ascend from depth holding your breath; this illustrates the cardinal rule of scuba diving: never hold your breath underwater. The diagram on the right shows how much compressed air is contained in metal scuba tank.



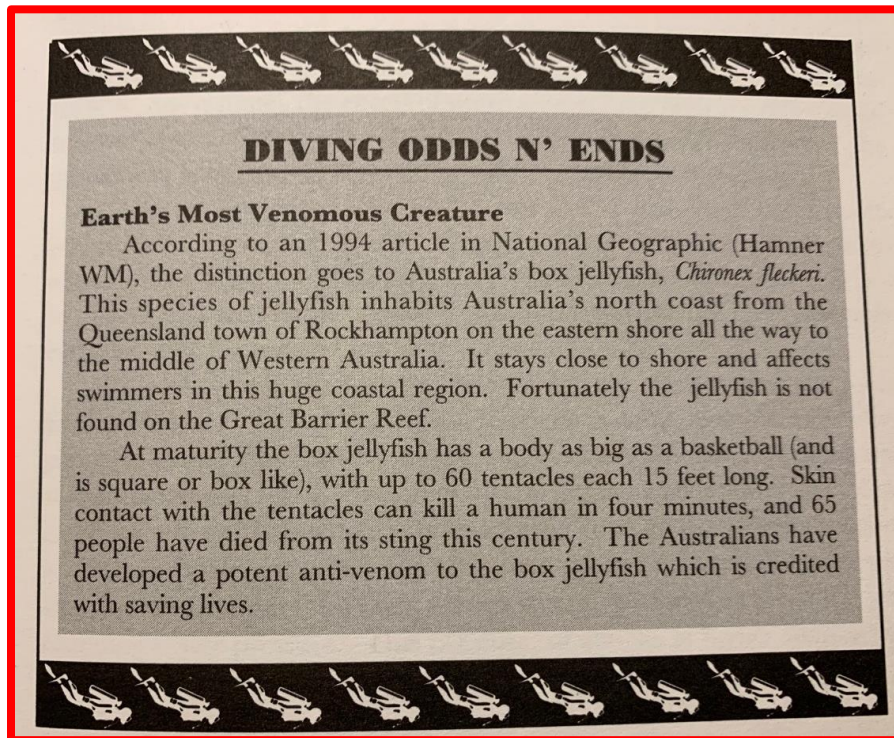
I also added plenty of single-answer and multiple-choice questions to test the reader's understanding. Answers are provided at the end of each chapter.

If the book's readers were motivated to understand diving physiology, they would learn it from this book, by following the routine and working on all the questions. I provided answers at the end of each chapter where the questions appear.

A non-fiction book that aims to instruct must be clear, informative, and along the way test the reader's understanding of the material.

That has been my method for every non-fiction book, starting with *Pulmonary Physiology in Clinical Practice* all the way to, years later, my three syllabi on basic music theory.

I also recommend, at least when writing for a general audience, to be a little entertaining. *Scuba Diving Explained* never loses sight of the fact that scuba diving is a sport, enjoyed by millions, and I inserted many paragraphs of random Odds N' Ends such as this one.



Among other topics discussed in my Odds N' Ends sections are:

Do fish sleep?

The great white shark

Lloyd Bridges [of *Sea Hunt* fame]

Cousteau's pneumothorax [collapsed lung]

Why don't whales get the bends?
Some famous shipwrecks
Top 10 diving destinations for Americans [number 1 is The Florida Keys]

A year or two after the book came out Best Publishing's owner wrote me and suggested we put out a second edition. Not much had changed in the world of scuba diving, but he felt a second edition would boost sales. I replied that, given sales of the first edition, Best should foot the expense, and if they did, I would be happy to update the book as needed. This seemed entirely reasonable to me. Why should the author have to spend another \$5000 when the publisher now knew the book had wide appeal?

I was turned down. I would have to pay upfront for a second edition, just like the first one. Miffed, I decided not to. I thought it was unfair, and that I was being taken advantage of. *Scuba Diving Explained* thus became my second popular book that died due to a disagreement with the publisher. Eventually, the popular first edition went out of print. To this day, I feel both Mosby and Best made a mistake.

Generalization is iffy, and there are always exceptions, but I think most authors are viewed by publishers as a dime a dozen, easy to replace, so it's "my way or the highway." Isaac Asimov was an exception. When he was with Doubleday, practically anything he wanted to write the company agreed to publish.

Postscript

Having time on my hands during the Covid pandemic, I got the idea of querying Best Publishing about a long-overdue second edition of *Scuba Diving Explained*. I found out that the publisher had been sold and, still under the same name, had relocated to North Palm Beach, FL. I wrote to the new owners, gave the history of the first edition, and enquired about a second edition. I made no mention of the upfront fee I paid in the 1990s. Best turned it down. Evidently their view of the market for this type of book was different from the original owner.

My scuba diving knowledge infused a fictional work that I first posted only on my website, Lakesidpress.com, in 1998: *The Wall: Chronicle of a Scuba Trial*. I never considered publishing it until 2015, when I published it on Kindle as an e-book. Then I waited another five years before putting it in out in paperback. Along the way there were multiple rewrites, and the final version won a Florida Writers Association award for published novella in 2021.

Robin Cook, M.D. (b. 1940)

I've only read a few of Robin Cook's novels. He wrote thirty-nine, and is the acknowledged master of "medical thrillers," most of which have been best sellers. His most famous novel is probably the first one, *Coma*, which was made into a popular movie.

Cook's first book was nonfiction, *Year of the Intern*. Its lack of commercial success led him to study bestsellers. In a January 1996 *New York Times* interview he stated:

I studied how the reader was manipulated by the writer. I came up with a list of techniques that I wrote down on index cards. And I used every one of them in *Coma*.¹

Okay, the rest is history. *Coma*, a story about creating a supply of transplant organs, came out in 1975. In March 1977, the paperback rights sold for \$800,000. As for the movie, Michael Crichton wrote the screenplay and directed the film, which came out in 1978. At the time Dr. Cook was only 38, on the cusp of an amazingly successful career as a writer.

Cook likes being called a doctor who writes. "I joke that if my books stop selling, I can always fall back on brain surgery. But I am still very interested in it. If I had to do it over again, I would still study medicine. I think of myself more as a doctor who writes, rather than a writer who happens to be a doctor."²

Cook went to medical school at Columbia University and trained as an ophthalmologist at Harvard. Upon completion of residency, he set up a private ophthalmology practice in Marblehead, Massachusetts, and accepted a clinical position at Harvard Medical School to teach residents and to see patients at the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary. The *Times* interview suggests he gave up his medical career for writing after his third novel:

After two more best sellers – "Sphinx," about the plundering of archeological sites, and "Brain," about the ethics of medical experimentation – Dr. Cook found he preferred being a full-time writer to pursuing a medical career.¹

What is interesting about Dr. Cook as an author is that he uses his medical background to provide plot and detail, in a way that a non-physician would likely be unable to do. Topics he has fictionalized include organ donation, fertility treatment, genetic engineering, *in vitro* fertilization, managed care, medical malpractice, medical tourism, drug research, and organ transplantation.

On the issue of pandemics, when interviewed about Covid-19 in July 2020, he was asked: "How many times have you tackled the subject of pandemics?" His answer:



Oh, a number. I wrote *Outbreak*. I wrote *Contagion*. I wrote *Pandemic*. And you know what else? I just remembered this now, I wrote an article for Foreign Policy in 2009. The point of it, at the end, was that I felt very, very strongly that the international community, through the World Health Organization, should really up vaccine development and the infrastructure that's necessary for that.³

There are several aspects of Dr. Cook's writing career worth noting.

- Like virtually all physician authors who achieved commercial success, Dr. Cook gave up medicine for writing at some point in his career. (This is also true for lawyers turned novelists, e.g., Scott Turow, John Grisham, John Scott Bell.) Dr. William Carlos Williams, profiled earlier, continued practicing medicine while writing, but he never reached any level close to Cook's fame or book sales.
- Dr. Cook's method of starting a novel is that of a plotter and not a pantser, the latter being someone who writes by the "seat of his pants." I wrote about this distinction in my prize-winning essay "Pour Out Your Words," advocating that beginners should just start writing and not waste time with outlines, character lists, and other diversions. Of course, I also pointed out that either method is fine if it suits the author. In a Boston Magazine interview, Cook was asked: "When you sit down to write a new book, do you know how it's going to end?" His reply:

Always. I came at this from being a chemistry, math, physics major in college, and an MD. So, when I started writing, I had to sort of learn on my own, but one of the benefits of my scientific background was planning everything out. I outline a tremendous amount at the start of writing a book, and I know the whole story. Of course, things happen when you're writing that you don't expect, because your characters will say things you didn't think of, or something, which is sort of the fun of writing.³
- His career validates my observation for self-published authors:

If you want to be commercially successful, best to stick to one genre.

By sticking to one genre, it is far easier to build a following than if you skip around to different genres. Irrespective of the quality of my writing, publishing under nine different genres is no way to acquire any kind of following. I never took the effort to build a mailing list, recruit readers, or do anything else recommended to self-published authors.

So, for commercial success, Robin Cook's method is the way to go. Even Isaac Asimov, the genius of multiple genres, first became famous for just one – science fiction. Had he not been well-known for his SF, it is unlikely his later non-fiction books would have sold nearly as well as they did.

I fantasize that one day my three Civil War novels will find a wide audience, and then – then! – that audience will also want to read my books about scuba diving, a Las Vegas love triangle, traveling to Mars, and climbing Mount Everest.⁴ Dream on!

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1. <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/01/21/business/talking-money-with-dr-robin-cook-prescription-real-estate-and-lots-of-it.html>
 2. <https://www.famousauthors.org/robin-cook>
 3. <https://www.bostonmagazine.com/news/2020/07/01/robin-cook-interview/>
 4. <https://www.amazon.com/kindle-dbs/entity/author/B000APVGH6>

Samuel Shem, M.D. (b. 1944)

In contrast to Robin Cook and other famous prolific novelists (e.g., Charles Dickens, Isaac Asimov, Michael Crichton, Tom Clancy, JK Rowling, Agatha Christie), Samuel Shem is well known mainly for a single book, *The House of God*, published in 1978.

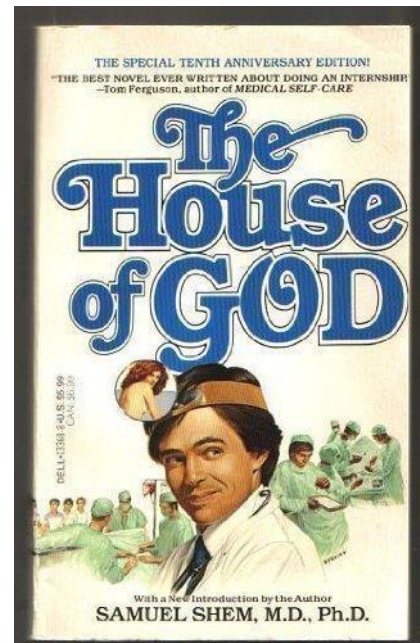
Fame (and perhaps fortune) based on just one book is the case with numerous authors throughout history. A few examples:

- Harriet Beecher Stowe – *Uncle Tom's Cabin*
- Emily Bronte – *Wuthering Heights*
- Oscar Wilde – *The Picture of Dorian Gray*
- Margaret Mitchell – *Gone With the Wind*
- Harper Lee -- *To Kill a Mockingbird*
- Joseph Heller – *Catch-22*
- J.D. Salinger – *The Catcher in the Rye*
- John Kennedy Toole – *A Confederacy of Dunces*
- John Berendt – *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*

Some of these authors wrote other books, but their single blockbuster novel is why we know about them. Their other books were not so critically acclaimed, not best sellers, and not made into movies.

Samuel Shem, the pen name for Dr. Steven Joseph Bergman, graduated Harvard Medical School and interned at Boston's Beth Israel Hospital. His intern year inspired *The House of God*, which is a scathing takedown on the training of doctors in the mid-1970s. I think just about all physicians of my generation read it. Today, probably not, since it's so non-PC.

Shem went on to write other novels and a play, which I have not read. It is *House of God* that puts him in this memoir. Like Mark Twain, his novel taught me to infuse some irony and humor in my medical stories. (It also got me started on writing a new novel, which went nowhere; see chapter, "Books that died aborning," Part 2.)



For commercial success – better than sticking to a single genre – write one blockbuster novel.

Golf: *Why Are You Still a Hacker?*

Golf: A good walk spoiled

My work in Mt. Sinai Medical Center was as a hospital-based pulmonologist, different from physicians whose main focus is on outpatient practice. However, I did see a few outpatients each week, in my hospital office. I made my own appointments, to make sure they fit into my daily schedule of teaching rounds, conferences, and lectures.

I mention this because one day in the mid-1980s, I told a patient over the phone, "I can see you Wednesday afternoon at 2 pm." To my surprise (and I remember this clearly), he said, half-jokingly, "Good, but isn't that your golf day?"

Apparently, doctors were known for taking Wednesday afternoons off to play golf. I remember thinking, at that instant, *How absurd. Why would I be playing golf?* "No," I replied, "I don't play golf."

Then, as the story goes, I took my family to a statewide pulmonary conference in October 1993, at Ohio's Salt Fork Lodge. The lodge is in hilly Salt Fork State Park, two hours from Cleveland. After the morning session, we had the afternoon off to explore the area, swim in the indoor pool, or try out new activities like horseback riding or...golf.

As a kid, I played miniature golf but otherwise never hit a golf ball with any club except a putter. Back in 1993 I didn't know an "iron" from a "fairway wood."

The lodge set up a hilltop driving range, and Ruth and I decided to try it out. Thus, it came to be that I hit my first golf ball at age fifty. We spent about an hour at the range, watching golf balls sail down the hill. "Hey, this is fun," I recall telling Ruth. She agreed.

Back home we bought clubs and began to visit local executive (9-hole) golf courses, to see what the game was like. For some reason, it still seemed like fun, though we could never find the hole in the three shots allowed to make "par."

We took lessons at a local golf shop. Then we went to out-of-town golf schools, first to Tucson, and later to Tampa and Myrtle Beach, SC. Fed up with the hassle of getting tee times on public courses, we joined a country club. We were serious!

Or at least I was. Ruth just wanted to have fun, the normal approach. I don't do normal once a subject interests me. I became obsessed with not just trying to hit the ball and find the hole, but to understand the mechanics, the rules, the etiquette. Which meant...another book.

As stated earlier, I never thought of writing a book about sailing because it was a subject I could not master, no matter how much I read and studied. Ditto golf. However, this limitation only applied to books I planned to *write and sell*. I could still write a book on any subject and just post it on my website. I was done with sailing by age 50; now, I was into golf. I decided to write a short book for golf "hackers," a loosely-defined term for really bad players. Really bad

because they don't understand how to swing the club, never bother to practice or take lessons, or keep a real score.

I combed through dozens of books on just about every aspect of the game, then wrote *Why are You Still a Hacker?* In nine chapters I explained how to get out of hacker-dom. I used publicly available illustrations. And there it sits, decades later, on my website.

<http://www.lakesidepress.com/Golf/Contents.htm>

Why Are You *STILL* a Hacker?

9 Steps to Escape Hacker-dom

by Lawrence Martin (ex-hacker)

(Author of [Secrets of the Best Golfers...](#))

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In the book I describe a “true hacker.”

Oops! The first ball is shanked hard left and almost goes out of bounds. No matter. So it's not a great shot, not even a good one. Her spouse/ friend/golfing buddy says, “Why don't you take a mulligan [a do-over shot]? I don't mind.” *Oh well*, she thinks, *I will take another shot*. After all, she knows her playing partner will likely do the same, if not on this first hole then later on. Oh-oh! Her mulligan shot is almost as bad as the first one, but more playable, and she settles for ball #2.

She finishes playing 18 holes and adds up her score. The mulligans aren't counted, the lost balls are blamed on course topography and also not counted, and any whiffs

out in the fairway or the rough are, well, conveniently ignored. In the end, her “score” bears no relationship to reality. But no matter. The hacker announces to her friends, “Well, not too bad today, I got 112.” What she won’t announce (because she doesn’t really know) is her true score, the score that includes penalties for lost balls, water shots, mulligans, and whiffs:

The game proceeds along this path. A few more mulligans. An occasional lost ball here and there. Like a sailor trying to get from point A to point B upwind, she tacks toward the green. And when there’s water – a pond or a stream -- isn’t it strange how her balls are attracted to it? Of course, water balls even happen to the pros; she’s seen that on TV, so it’s not so embarrassing.

The true golf hacker drives to the course on a weekend, gets out of the car and in no time is on the links. No warmup, no driving range, no putting practice. She [or he – either pronoun fits] may even be using her father’s old set of clubs. On the first tee there is a palpable air of excitement. She may think: *It’s so pretty out here. The fairway is fairly wide; maybe today I’ll finally have a breakthrough. All I need to do is put together a few good shots and not whiff the ball.*

Okay, that’s a little extreme. Just a little. Basically, the book focuses on obvious ways for beginners to improve: take lessons, practice, play, and keep a real score. These steps certainly helped to improve my game, but did not – could not – make me a truly “good golfer,” which I loosely define as someone with a handicap below 15. The beginning paragraphs of Step 1 explain why.

Step 1. Admit You're a Hacker

The difference between hackers, good amateurs and the pros.

I have never read a golf book, except my own when I edited them.

Jack Nicklaus, during an interview on [The Golf Channel](#)

The game of golf is hopelessly difficult to master. Nothing you read in a golf book or magazine is going to help you much, without concomitant practice and development of muscle memory for a decent swing. Golf is not like learning to ride a bike (you either stay up or you fall), studying to climb a mountain (you either reach the summit or you don't), scuba diving (you either breathe under water or you drown), or countless other skills that involve some motor coordination. *Golf is like learning to play music.*

Let's say you have zero musical background but, as an adult, decide to study piano. You passionately love music, but never took any lessons; now, as an adult you want to learn. Your spouse is supportive, but you have a regular day job and can only practice on weekends.

How good can you become? You will forever be an amateur of course, and not a very good one. You might learn to play Beethoven's Fur Elise, but most of the time you will be playing before an audience of one: yourself. (Well, two during a lesson.)

When you listen to a professional pianist play Beethoven or Mozart, do you say "Why can't I be as good as she?" Of course not — you know why you can't be. Unlike yourself: *she* started playing as a child; *she* has talent, recognized early and nurtured along by a supportive family. For professional musicians, talent nurtured early in life is a *sine qua non*.

Same thing in golf. *Virtually all* professional golfers started playing as children or young teens. An early start in golf is so universal among the top players that starting past puberty is almost an anomaly. In a brief bio on the internet of Miguel Angel Jimenez, a 1999 European Ryder cup team member, the author thought it interesting to note (italics added):

"Consistent Spaniard is...an ex-caddie who *only took up the game when he was 15.*"

I got some nice feedback from the book — among my circle of fellow golfers, none of whom were hackers. I enjoyed writing it and in doing so learned much about the game. It reminds me of an old joke, which I'll paraphrase: Those who can, do. Those who can't, write about it.

How do you write a book about a subject when you are not an expert?

Answer: Go to your computer and start typing.

My answer is not meant to be facetious. A great way to learn about a subject is to do sufficient research so you can explain it *in writing*. If you can explain something clearly, chances are you understand it. You don't have to be an expert or a recognized authority. Just admit your limitations, and state clearly who you are writing for. That's why Isaac Asimov was such a successful writer on so many nonfiction subjects, from the Bible to the Roman Empire to Gilbert & Sullivan. He was not a theologian, not a historian, not a musician. But he studied these subjects and knew how to explain them to other non-experts. So, I make no apologies for writing books and websites about golf (or, later, music theory).

If you want to learn a subject in depth, do research and write about it. A story, an article, a website, or a book.

I didn't stop with my "hacker" book. I also created other golf-related websites and put them into a modestly-titled index, "Unique Golf Web Sites."

<http://www.lakesidepress.com/Golf/index-golf.htm>

Unique Golf Web Sites

Published by Lakeside Press

Secrets of the Best Golfers: From a Professional...Golfer
The 4 secrets of the best golfers - ones you'll NEVER read
in any commercial golf magazine

Why Are You STILL a Hacker?

A golf primer for hackers who REALLY want to improve
their game

Avante Garde Golfer

A Golf Journal of the future, with fictitious reviews of
books, movies, equipment and more

Quimet: An American Hero

A screenplay about Francis Ouimet, winner of the 1913
U.S. Open

Comprehensive Golf Bibliography

With links to Amazon.com

Front 9 golf quiz quiz

A multiple choice quiz

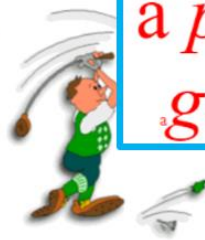
Back 9 golf quiz

Continuation of multiple choice quiz

Note that one of these websites is “Secrets of the Best Golfers: From a Professional... Golfer.” <http://www.lakesidepress.com/Golf/GolfSecrets.htm>. From a distance, the title page (below) looks like the author is a professional golfer. Look closely at the headline and you can see the small print (enlarged on right). I used this misdirection to draw attention to my “secrets”.

Secrets of the best golfers -
- from a *professional*_{and}
golfer

by Lawrence Martin, M.D.
author of *Why Are You STILL a Hacker?*



a *professional*_{and}
golfer

The title is a fraud. Go back and read it closely! I am a professional, that's true: a licensed medical physician. And I am surely a golfer. My double digit handicap belies the many hours spent trying to tame inconsistency. But I am not a *professional golfer* - as in one who plays or teaches golf for a living. No way.

But wait! Now that I have your attention I do have some 'secrets' to tell. They pertain to all the best golfers in the world. I don't mean just the touring pros, but all players who can get around the course with a par score or close to it.

My golf obsession extended to the history of the sport. I read about Sydney Ouimet, a 20-year-old amateur who won the 1913 U.S. Open in Brookline, Mass. (He is pictured in the middle with his 1913 playoff opponents Harry Vardon and Ted Ray.)

For reasons I cannot fathom, but which I am certain came spontaneously without any influence by anything published, I decided to write a play about the 1913 event. I called it "Ouimet: An American Hero."

After I wrote the play and posted it on my website, I learned of a book about this tournament, published by author Mark Frost, titled *The Greatest Game Ever Played* (Hyperion, 2002). Then Frost produced a screenplay of the book, which was made into a popular movie starring Shia LaBeouf and Stephen Dillane (poster, below). The movie came out in 2005. Since my work preceded Frost's, I didn't get the idea from him. And I'm certain he didn't get it from me, since my script was never published (though I did register it with Writers Guild in 2002). Just pure coincidence. A few years after the movie came out, I posted a disclaimer on my website.





Ouimet: An American Hero

Note: This is NOT the script for [The Greatest Game Ever Played](#), which was written by Mark Frost, based on his non-fiction book of the same name. My script was actually written before his book came out, and well before the movie based on his book was produced. For anyone wishing a full account of this 1913 US Open Match, I highly recommend the Frost book and movie. (Lawrence Martin, February 2009)

It's because of the opportunity to play golf without the hassle of arranging tee times at municipal courses, or the expense and cliquishness of country club golf, that my wife and I were initially attracted to The Villages. With its 41 executive courses and computerized tee-time system, there is always some place to play.

Another plus: by always walking the courses and using a push cart (see photo), we get outdoor exercise three-four times a week. The score may be well over par at the end of the nine holes (usually is), but by the end of each game, the two to three miles we've walked make it all worthwhile.



Oh, one more plus: the wildlife you see on the courses, including many species of birds indigenous to central Florida, like these sandhill cranes. They have the right of way.



And, alligators. If your ball lands near one, you get a free ball drop to a safe zone of your choice, as long as it's no closer to the hole. Not to worry. I've never seen any reptile leave the water to chase after a golf ball. Or a golfer.



Family Influence

As pointed out in the Preface, *My Writing Life* is not a traditional memoir. Though it recounts my path to writing, with all the ups and downs, it also offers advice to other writers, particularly those new to the craft. So, it's sort of a quasi-memoir, focusing mainly on my avocation (writing), less on my medical career, and relatively little on my personal life, or my family.

In reading all the interesting bios of famous writers I often came across dysfunction or unhappiness -- multiple wives, infidelity, scandals, depression, suicide. In this regard, I've been fortunate. Ruth and I have been married over five decades. We each had a rewarding medical career and stayed healthy enough to enjoy retirement.

Our three girls, all professionals and in good marriages, have given us five wonderful grandchildren. (I know, I know. All grandchildren are wonderful, but ours especially so.)

While working, we were able to pay for our kids' undergraduate and graduate educations, and to travel where my latest obsession took us: golfing in various states, or scuba-diving in the Caribbean, or hiking in the national parks. All good stuff, but let's face it: for a memoir of an unknown author, pretty mundane. You hiked the Grand Canyon? Great. Who cares?

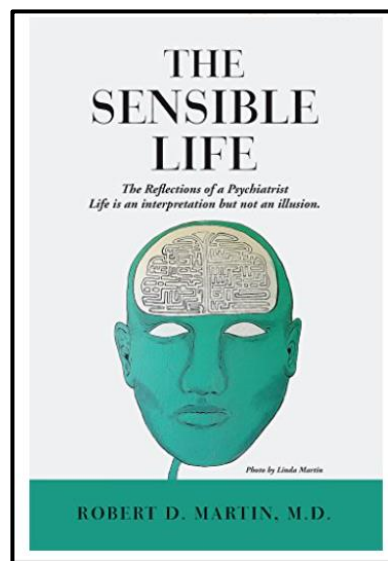
Still, the reader may have questions about family influences on my writing gig (and if not, just skip this chapter).

Growing up in Savannah, there were no writers in my family. I don't know why I started the diary as a teenager; I just did. I have an older brother Bob, born 1939, and a younger brother Bernie, born 1947. They both turned to writing but only years later, well into middle-age, and not when we were kids.

Bob went to medical school and had a career in New York as a psychiatrist. Bernie got a master's degree in city planning and worked for one of the telecoms in Atlanta and then Denver, before retiring. They were no influence at all on my writing; if anything, it was the other way around.

After I produced a dozen or so books, I first became aware that they had also been writing, but for how long I don't know; to that point they had published nothing for the general public. That's when I first began to receive some of their work, asking for my comments.

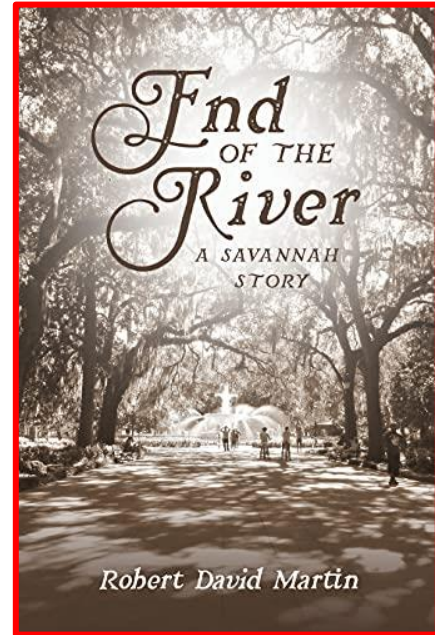
Bob wrote a total of four books, all self-published. His first one, *The Sensible Life* (2015), gives his reflections on life from the perspective of a practicing psychiatrist. His latest book, *End of The River* (2021) is a semi-fictionalized account of his growing up in Savannah. It ends when he leaves Savannah to attend Oglethorpe College in Atlanta. Bernie and I are mentioned in passing, one sentence each. When I pointed this out he replied, in an email: "For the record, I didn't see how I could integrate you two into the quite linear story line. The book was about coming to



terms with Dad, the world outside the family and the meaning of reality. It simply wasn't about us siblings.”

Bernie wrote several short stories, but never did much to get anything published (not even self-published). After he read my novel *The Wall: Chronicle of a Scuba Trial*, he thought it would make a good play and actually drafted a screenplay of the trial. He sent it to me and I made a few revisions, but we never tried to get it published or produced. (Available, if anyone is interested.)

The big difference between my writing and my brothers' is that they wrote in a near-vacuum. Neither joined a critique club, though I recommended that repeatedly. When they sought feedback, it was only from family or close friends. My critiques met a variable response; sometimes appreciative, other times wondering if the problem was me, not their writing. No doubt my comments would have had more influence had they come from non-relatives in a regular critique group.



Bob did pay to have his books professionally proofread, so there are no grammatical or syntax errors. Could his books have been better had he sought impartial feedback during the writing process? I think so.

When I read in my critique club, fellow writers tell me if something is unclear or confusing. They're usually right, and I wonder: why did I not see that? The writer's mind can play tricks; you think something is clear when you first write it, but then find it's not clear to the reader, that it can be made better. Revision follows.

Impartial critiques during the writing process can often point out obvious mistakes, or unclear passages, and lead to necessary revisions.

Back to family. When our oldest daughter Joanna reached junior high, I was already well into my writing binge. She was ten when *Breathe Easy* was published.

In junior high or high school, our daughters would occasionally ask me for help with an assigned essay. This often didn't go well.

“Dad, can you help me with...?”

“Sure,” I say, flattered by the request. “Let me see what you wrote.”

She shows me the draft. I read through it.

“I can fix this. Now, do you want to get an A, a B or a C?”

“Dad!”

Ruth, hearing the conversation, chimes in. “Larry, just help her write the thing. Don't be such a smart-ass.”

So, my daughter and I work together to produce an essay plausible for her grade, one that doesn't read like it came from some middle-aged professional. I recall several encounters of this type, each time a struggle: the requesting daughter both seeking my help and wary of the process.

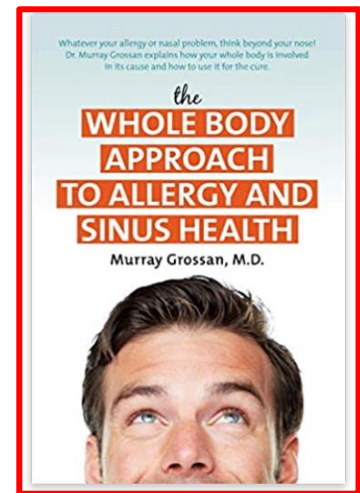
Now, two of them are lawyers and one is a physician, and they do a lot of professional writing. I believe they are certainly capable of writing for the general public as well, including fiction, and perhaps one day they will. I would love to think *My Writing Life* helped inspire them. And our grandchildren.

There is one other family member who wrote books: Uncle Murray Grossan, my mother's brother. Murray grew up in Savannah and went to medical school in the 1940s. He trained as an ear, nose, and throat specialist in New York, then left for Los Angeles, where he practiced for sixty years.

Murray wrote several nonfiction books for the general public, plus numerous magazine articles. His books focus mainly on allergies and sinus disease, conditions within his specialty; the one shown here was published in 2015, when he was ninety-two!

My mother and uncle had the same genes for intelligence, but she never went to college. She and Uncle Murray matured in the 1930s, during the Great Depression. The boy got the college education, became a doctor. The girl became a bookkeeper, married a man who also did not attend college and who worked as a traveling salesman. They raised three boys: me, Bob, and Bernie. Though our parents were active readers, to my knowledge they never wrote anything -- except checks.

Is there a writing gene? Did I inherit something that stimulated me to generate so many ideas and put them into print? Until I started writing this book, I never thought there was any "family influence." Now, on reflection, I'm not so sure.



Cleveland and Mt. Sinai Hospital

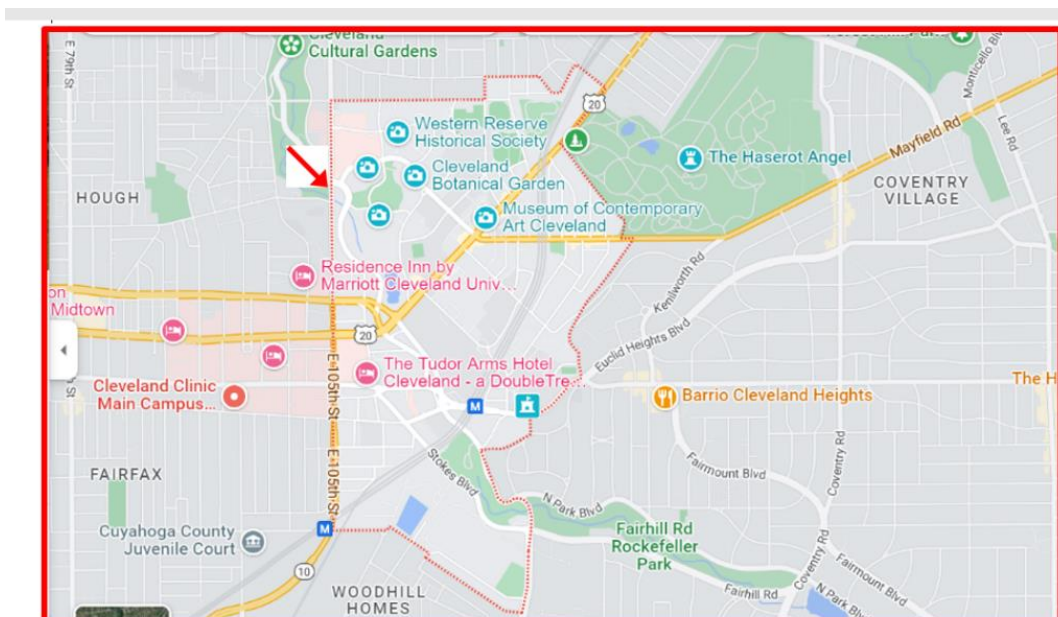
In 1950 Cleveland's population was 914,808. In the 1980 census, four years after we moved there, the population was 573,822. You could drive by just about any section of the city and see vacant lots where houses and stores once stood.

The city's population drop, percentage-wise, was second only to Detroit. The reasons were similar: decline of the auto industry, which at one time was Cleveland's biggest employer; "white flight" to the suburbs, in part due to court-ordered forced bussing and deterioration of public schools; and, for retirees, migration from high tax/harsh winter weather to low tax/better weather states like Texas, Arizona, and Florida.

The city continued to shrink. The 1990 population declined another 12%, to 505,616. The 2020 census counted 372,624 people. Although much of the city's loss was people moving to the suburbs, Cuyahoga County, which contains both Cleveland and dozens of suburbs, also declined in population, from 1.75 million to 1970 to 1.25 million in 2021.

Even with the population decline, the one bright spot in the city was (and still is) University Circle (UC), an area five miles east of downtown (see map). UC contains major cultural institutions, including Severance Hall, home of the Cleveland Orchestra; the Cleveland Institute of Art; the Cleveland Historical Society; Case Western Reserve University and its highly rated medical school; University Hospitals, the major teaching unit of the medical school; and the Cleveland VA Hospital. Immediately adjacent to UC is the world-renowned Cleveland Clinic, a huge medical campus.

When we moved to Cleveland there was one other institution in University Circle: Mt. Sinai Medical Center, location shown by the arrow.



Below is an aerial view of Mt. Sinai Medical Center, from the 1990s. Photo is from <https://www.mtsinaifoundation.org/history/>.



Mt. Sinai originally opened in the early twentieth century, to give Jewish physicians a place to train and practice. At its peak the hospital had 400 inpatient beds and a nursing school, plus research laboratories. During my 24-year career as head of Pulmonary Medicine at Mt. Sinai, the hospital enjoyed consistently high ratings for patient care. It was a major teaching affiliate of Case Medical School, and in my position I taught pulmonary fellows (graduate doctors training in my specialty), house officers (interns and residents), and medical students.

In the 1970s Mt. Sinai still largely served Cleveland's Jewish doctors and their patients. But doctors' practices and much of the city's middle class population, was rapidly migrating to suburban hospitals for their care. To meet this need, in the 1980s Mt. Sinai built a suburban office building, ten miles east of University Circle.

Unfortunately, for an independent city hospital like Mt. Sinai, the demographics were predictive. It's not just "in retrospect" that the hospital should have moved to the suburbs with the suburban shift of patients and doctors. It was evident in "prospect" as well. In 1981 there was in fact a formal proposal to move the hospital to Pepper Pike, a suburb surrounded by a large and affluent Jewish population. But the hospital board nixed the proposal, in part (per news items) so it could continue to serve the inner-city population.

At the time Mt. Sinai was the only hospital on the east side of Cleveland with a Level 1 Trauma center, which means it took care of the most seriously injured trauma patients, i.e., severely ill patients who likely had no or minimal insurance (Medicaid). Over the 1980s Mt. Sinai saw a dwindling number of insured suburban patients, and more and more non-paying or indigent patients. And, location-wise, it was still competing with the two behemoth medical centers, University Hospitals (UH) and the Cleveland Clinic, neither of which offered Level 1 trauma care. Shooting victims were all brought to Sinai.

The result was inevitable. In 1996 the hospital board sold the institution to a for-profit company, that promised to build up the hospital. In “prospect” this was not going to happen. To this day I don’t know why that company bought the hospital; demographics made it bound to fail. Four years later, February 2000, the hospital closed and I was no longer employed.

With our youngest daughter Amy still in high school, and Ruth well-established in psychiatry practice, we had no intention nor desire to leave Cleveland. Our house construction debacle was long past, and we had established very good personal and professional relationships in the area. Most importantly, I had no trouble finding another pulmonary position. I opted to join a large, multi-specialty group practice in the suburbs, called Mednet.

Mt. Sinai was not the only hospital suffering from demographic change. Other independent hospitals either closed or were bought out by one of the two medical giants, the Cleveland Clinic or University Hospitals. In fact, within three years, Mednet was taken over by University Hospitals. At that point the focus of my career turned to a small UH-owned suburban hospital in Richmond Heights. In short order I became head of the Utilization Review department and chairman of the Department of Medicine at UH-Richmond Medical Center.

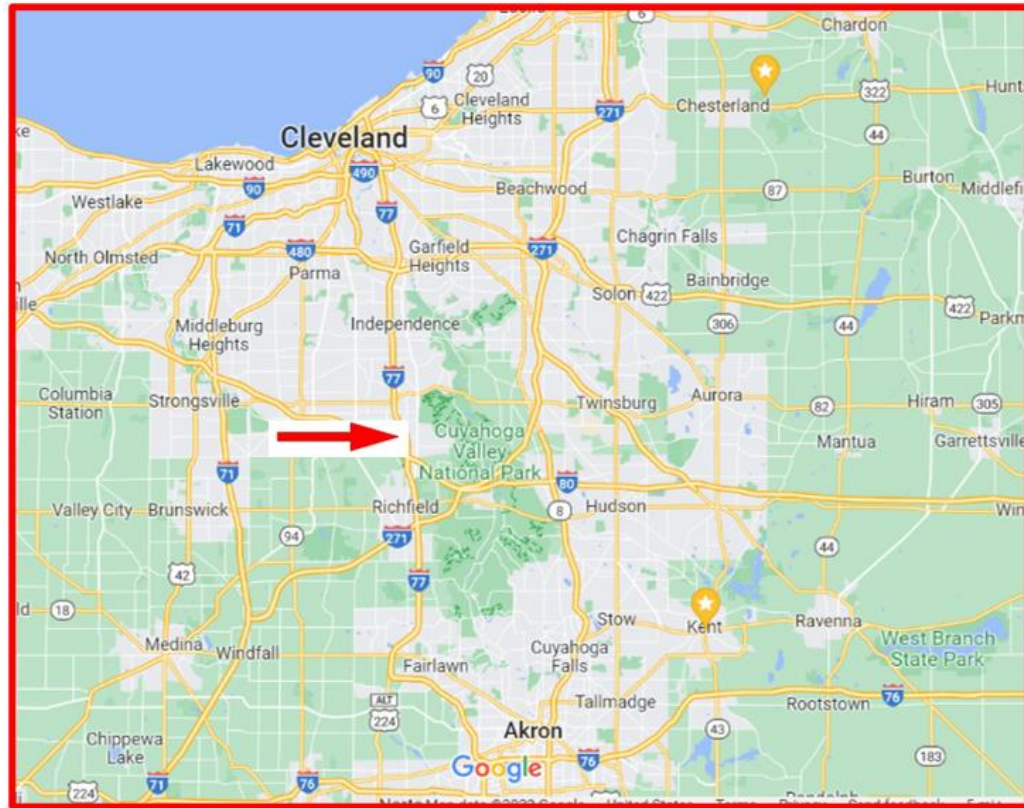
Thus, except for a few weeks of unemployment in February and March of 2000, I continued to practice pulmonary medicine. And, of course, my writing never stopped.

In early 1976, after I accepted the job in Cleveland, and we made plans to move from New York, we endured the expected comments from provincial New Yorkers. “Cleveland? How can you move *there*?” “It’s the Midwest. Rust Belt. Snow belt. Not East Coast,” etc. As I said, provincial New Yorkers.

In fact, northeast Ohio was a good place to live, raise a family, and practice medicine. The cost of living was reasonable, and housing much more affordable than in New York. The downside of course, is that with affordability there was also no property appreciation. On resale we lost money on each of the five suburban homes we owned during our thirty-nine years in Ohio.

But a small metro area like Greater Cleveland has distinct advantages. For one, commuting was always a breeze. Metro Cleveland probably has more expressway miles per capita than any big city. For a city of its size the cultural scene is great, including concerts, plays (professional and little theater), music festivals, and recitals. When, near retirement and we took up folk instruments (ukulele and, for Ruth, the dulcimer), we found a vibrant folk music community.

Then there is the largest hiking club in America, which we joined in 2003. The 1000+ member Cleveland Hiking Club offers five-ten hikes every day of the year, and all you have to do is show up at the trail head. Hike levels, published in advance, range from easy to strenuous. We became enamored of the great parks system surrounding the city, including Cuyahoga Valley National Park, situated between Cleveland and Akron (see map).



Along with golf, hiking became a major outdoor activity. On several occasions I lead hikes in North Chagrin Reservation, one of the parks close to our home. We also took several out-of-town trips with the club, to hike scenic parks in Idaho, Pennsylvania, and Utah.

I could go on about interesting and rewarding aspects of living in Northeast Ohio, but will mention just one more: Mormon history. In one of those micro-obsessions I was prone to, I became very interested in Mormon history after reading Jon Krakauer's book *Under the Banner of Heaven* (2004).

I learned that the religion's founder, Joseph Smith (1805-1844), migrated from upstate New York to Kirtland, Ohio in 1831, and there built the first Mormon Temple, dedicated in 1836 (see photo). Now known as the Kirtland Temple, it is open for tours. Since it was but a fifteen-minute ride from where we lived, I toured it a couple of times. The Temple is no longer run by the Mormons, but by the Community of Christ, and is now a National Historic Landmark.



Across the street from the Temple is “Historic Kirtland,” which includes original Mormon structures, and also offers guided tours.

In 1838 Smith was chased out of Kirtland for alleged bank fraud, and after a stint in Missouri in 1839, he moved to Nauvoo, IL. His life in Nauvoo was contentious, and in 1844 he ended up in jail for polygamy and perjury. While in jail, on June 27, 1844, he was murdered by an angry mob.

Well, I could go on. The Mormon history is fascinating, and I read several books about it, and in one of our trips visited Salt Lake City, where we heard the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. We also visited Georgetown, Utah, a gateway to Utah’s national parks.

Georgetown was founded by the Mormons in 1861, and today has some of the widest streets of any city. Why? Because in nineteenth century Utah the streets were designed so a team of oxen could easily make a U-turn.

Fascinating history, but only a micro-obsession. I did not write a book about it.

The Story of Oxygen

While writing my physiology textbooks I became interested in the history of oxygen: its scientific discovery, early uses, abuses – everything. When I say “interested” I mean “obsession.”

I delved into primary resources, spent time at Case Western Reserve’s Dittrick Medical History Center, sought out nineteenth century books on the subject. Because I found the history so fascinating, and wanted to learn more, I thought of writing a book about the history of oxygen, from its discovery to the modern era,

The credit for oxygen’s discovery goes to Englishman Joseph Priestley (1733-1804). In 1774 he found heating mercuric oxide released a gas that could ignite a glowing splinter. He called the gas “dephlogisticated air,” thinking there was also another element in the air called “phlogiston.” Take away the phlogiston and you have a pure gas that supports a flame – oxygen. (The phlogiston theory was later discredited; there is no such thing as phlogiston.)

Historically, another scientist actually discovered oxygen two years earlier, a German-Swedish chemist named Carl Wilhelm Scheele. However, since Priestley published first, he generally gets the credit, or at least the fame.

Priestley was not just a scientist. He was also a founder of the Unitarian church and in his time was known as a religious “dissenter.” He was also publicly vocal about politics, speaking in favor of the American and French revolutions. Priestley’s religious and political beliefs irritated a lot of people and he was hounded out of England. Hounded out? In July 1791 a mob burned down his home in Birmingham. He escaped to London, and eventually settled in Northumberland County, Pennsylvania where he set up a chemistry lab.

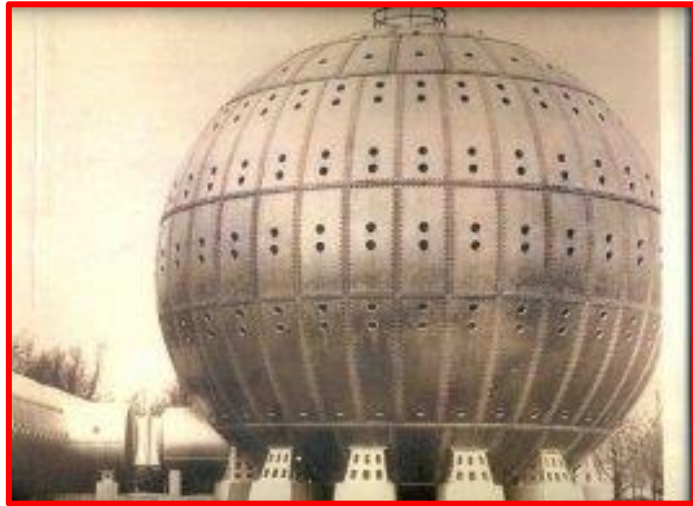
Once oxygen was discovered, along with the understanding that it was essential for life, *oxygen therapy* came into vogue. While the gas was sometimes administered to patients in need, it was also often promulgated using methods that had no scientific basis. One paper in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* advocated giving the gas by enema. (OXYGEN ENEMATA AS A REMEDY IN CERTAIN DISEASES OF THE LIVER AND INTESTINAL TRACT, by J.H. Kellogg, M.D. JAMA, 1888)

Not until the early 20th century was there any real science behind using oxygen for patients. The field took off with another Englishman, John Scott Haldane (1860-1936), now considered the father of modern oxygen therapy. Haldane published on high altitude physiology, diving physiology, oxygen therapy, and carbon monoxide poisoning. His work led to more rational use of oxygen for patients.

You see the interest building in the story of oxygen? Priestley, a Unitarian minister, discovers oxygen; another scientist also makes the discovery, but his name is second fiddle in all the history books. Priestley is chased out of England for his religious and political views. Over the next century oxygen is used haphazardly, sometimes for pure quackery. Science takes hold

in the early 20th century with the work of Haldane, and then evolves into science-based oxygen therapy.

But, but some quackery persists. In my research I came upon the most expensive piece of “oxygen” quackery in the history of medicine – the largest hyperbaric facility in the world. And, amazingly, it was built in the 1920s in Euclid, Ohio, across the street from a clinic where I saw outpatients! The structure was a giant five-story tall steel ball (see photo). It was long gone when we moved to Cleveland, having been torn down in the 1940s to provide material for World War II factories.



When in operation it was known as the Cunningham Sanitarium, after its builder Dr. Orval J. Cunningham. He was a leading exponent of hyperbaric therapy which, at the time, was only known to be effective for caisson workers suffering the bends, or decompression sickness. Cunningham advocated it for diabetes and a host of other conditions.

And what exactly was “it”? Turns out the steel ball was built to provide a slightly increased air pressure inside. No extra oxygen was added, so the air was still the same twenty-one percent oxygen, just at a higher pressure.

The American Medical Association began investigating Cunningham’s claims, and came to the conclusion they were entirely specious: not a shred of evidence that this giant hyperbaric chamber cured any of the diseases he advertised. In May 1928, while the tank was still under construction, the AMA Journal published a critical review of Dr. Cunningham’s treatment. Although not stated in the AMA review, the extra oxygen afforded by the higher atmospheric pressure could just as easily -- and far more cheaply -- have been delivered from a tank of pressurized oxygen delivered to the patient under ambient atmospheric pressure. Tank oxygen was certainly available in the 1920s, though not widely used. In any case, the Cunningham Steel Ball fell into disrepute, and was no longer used after a few years.

The Joseph Priestley biography, rectal oxygen, the Cunningham steel ball – those are just a few aspects of this fascinating history. To facilitate my research, I created a comprehensive web site, quoting from all the primary sources. Below is a screen shot of the contents page, showing the primary sources in chronologic order. In the website, each one links to information from an historic document.

Oxygen Therapy: The First 150 Years

Curiosities, Quackeries, and Other Historical Trivia

A CHRONOLOGY FROM PRIESTLEY TO HALDANE, BASED MAINLY ON ORIGINAL SOURCES

With Editorial Comment

18th CENTURY

- [1774 -- Priestley: EXPERIMENTS AND OBSERVATIONS ON DIFFERENT KINDS OF AIR](#)
- [1783 -- Caillens: FIRST CASE IN WHICH OXYGEN ACTUALLY EMPLOYED AS A REMEDY \(as quoted by Smith\)](#)
- [1799 -- Beddoes and Humphry: NOTICE FROM THE BRISTOL GAZETTE and PUBLIC ADVERTISER](#)

19th CENTURY

- [1820 -- Hill: PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE USE OF OXYGEN, OR VITAL AIR IN THE CURE OF DISEASES...](#)
- [1830 -- Silliman: ELEMENTS OF CHEMISTRY IN THE ORDER OF THE LECTURES GIVEN IN YALE COLLEGE...](#)
- [1857 -- Birch: ON THE THERAPEUTIC USE OF OXYGEN...](#)
- [1859 -- Birch: ON OXYGEN AS A THERAPEUTIC AGENT...](#)
- [1866 -- Demarquay \(translated by Wallian\): ESSAY ON MEDICAL PNEUMATOLOGY...](#)
- [1869 -- Wallian: SUPEROXYGENATION AS A THERAPEUTIC MEASURE](#)
- [1869 -- Mackey: ON THE THERAPEUTICAL VALUE OF THE INHALATION OF OXYGEN GAS](#)
- [1870 -- Barth: OXYGEN: A REMEDY IN DISEASE**](#)
- [1870 -- Smith: OXYGEN GAS AS A REMEDY IN DISEASE](#)
- [1872 -- Davenport: OXYGEN AS A REMEDIAL AGENT](#)
- [1881 -- Starkey: COMPOUND OXYGEN -- ITS MODE OF ACTION AND RESULTS**](#)
- [1885 -- Wallian: FURTHER REPORT ON OXYGEN AS A THERAPEUTIC AGENT](#)
- [1886 -- Wallian: A FURTHER WORD ON OXYGEN TREATMENT AND OXYGEN CHARLATA!](#)
- [1886 -- Smith: CLINICAL NOTES: OXYGEN IN THERAPEUTICS](#)
- [1887 -- Osler: THE TREATMENT OF PNEUMONIA](#)
- [1887 -- Ehinger: OXYGEN IN THERAPEUTICS, A TREATISE...**](#)
- [1888 -- Starkey & Palen: COMPOUND OXYGEN - ITS ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT**](#)
- [1888 -- Kellogg: OXYGEN ENEMATA AS A REMEDY IN CERTAIN DISEASES...](#)
- [1889 -- Wallian: Advertisement for Demarquay's ESSAY ON MEDICAL PNEUMATOLOGY and AEROTHERAPY...**](#)
- [1890 -- Blodgett: THE CONTINUOUS INHALATION OF OXYGEN IN CASES OF PNEUMONIA OTHERWISE FATAL...](#)
- [1890 -- Wallian: SOURCES OF FAILURE IN THE USE OF OXYGEN](#)
- [1892 -- Osler: THE PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE OF MEDICINE \(1st edition\)](#)
- [1898 -- Osler: THE PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE OF MEDICINE \(3rd edition\)](#)
- [1899 -- Conklin: THE THERAPEUTIC VALUE OF OXYGEN](#)

20th CENTURY

- [1908 -- Bainbridge: OXYGEN IN MEDICINE AND SURGERY...](#)
- [1910 -- Willcox & Collingwood: THE THERAPEUTIC USE OF ALCOHOL VAPOUR MIXED WITH OXYGEN](#)
- [1912 -- Hill: THE ADMINISTRATION OF OXYGEN](#)
- [1914 -- Howitt: THE SUBCUTANEOUS INJECTION OF OXYGEN GAS](#)
- [1916 -- Tunnicliff & Stebbing: THE INTRAVENOUS INJECTION OF OXYGEN GAS...](#)
- [1917 -- Haldane: THE THERAPEUTIC ADMINISTRATION OF OXYGEN](#)
- [1917 -- Meltzer: THE THERAPEUTIC VALUE OF ORAL RHYTHMIC INSUFFLATION OF OXYGEN](#)
- [1920 -- Haldane & Barcroft: OXYGEN THERAPY](#)
- [1922 -- Haldane: RESPIRATION](#)
- [1928 -- Cunningham: "MONSTER STEEL BALL" HYPERBARIC CHAMBER**](#)

Here is the introduction to this website.

INTRODUCTION: Supplemental or “extra” oxygen is one of the most widely used therapies for people admitted to the hospital. It is also frequently used for patients with chronic lung disease who live at home. In all cases oxygen is administered by inhalation. The importance of oxygen therapy for many patients with heart and lung diseases is now universally recognized.

Oxygen makes up 21% of the atmosphere we breathe, but it was not discovered as a separate gas until the late 18th century. Although oxygen's life-supporting role was understood early on, it took about 150 years for the gas to be used in a proper fashion for patients. For the first 150 years after discovery, therapeutic use of oxygen was sporadic, erratic, controversial, comical, beset by quackery, and only occasionally helpful. Not until the pioneering work of Haldane, Stadie, Barcroft and others, early in the 20th century, was oxygen therapy placed on a rational, scientific basis. For the first century and a half, oxygen therapy was characterized by methods that could not have resulted in much physiologic benefit. Impurities in oxygen, its use on an intermittent basis, and lack of physiologic measurement were principal problems.

Excerpts quoted are from the early medical literature on oxygen therapy, and also from publications aimed at the general public. The latter, consisting mainly of promotional materials or advertisements, were often disguised as scientific books, articles and pamphlets. In all quotes the spelling has been left as published (except for Priestley, who used “f” in place of “s”, the custom in the 1770s; this has been changed for the sake of readability). My comments are in brackets.

I had the information and the background to write a great nonfiction book I would call *The Story of Oxygen*. My model for this type of book was Richard Rhodes’ monumental *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*. Like his book, I envisioned a detailed, scientifically accurate and fascinating history about something vitally important to mankind.

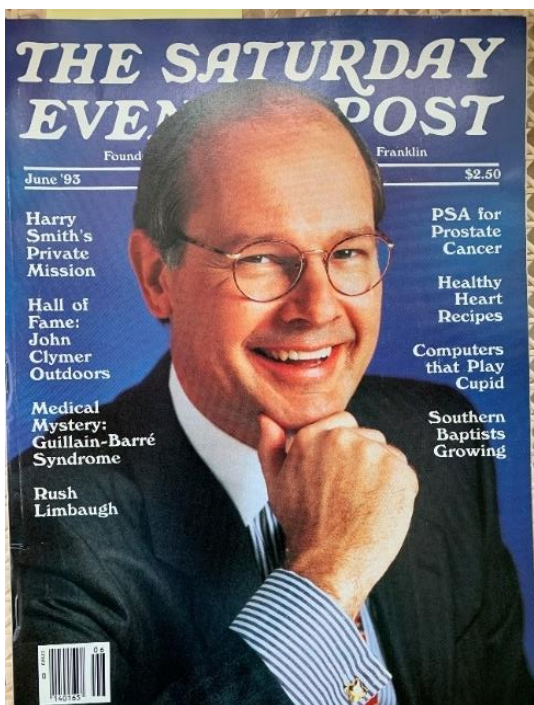
Nothing came of my idea, for a very good reason. As much as I had learned creating the websites, the amount of research needed to write a comprehensive history like Rhodes’s book would be enormous, not something I could undertake while practicing medicine full time, giving medical talks, studying for board exams, etc. It was just not a practical, feasible project, certainly not one to undertake without a publishing contract. And I never bothered querying any publishers. A great idea, it just never took off.

“We Can’t Kill Your Mother!”

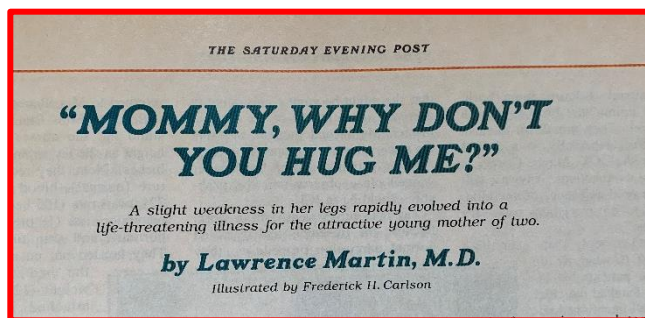
Pickwickian Redux

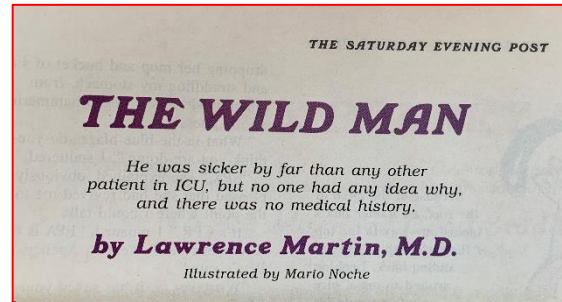
After “*Pickwickian*” and *Other Stories of Intensive Care* came out in 1991, I continued to write about my ICU patients. By 1996 I had published a total of twelve stories, in four different magazines.

- “A Case for Intensive Care” -- *The Gamut*, Fall 1982
- “Hammer Home the Message to Patients Who Smoke” -- *Medical Economics*, January 1991
- “Pickwickian” -- *The Gamut*, Winter 1991
- “We can’t kill your mother!” -- *Medical Economics*, March 1991
- “Mr. Bowman’s Solution” -- *The Saturday Evening Post*, April 1991
- “Too Much Sugar, Too Little History” -- *The Gamut*, Winter, 1992
- “The Red Baron” -- *The Saturday Evening Post*, January 1993
- “Mommy, why don’t you hug me?” -- *The Saturday Evening Post*, May 1993.
- “The Wild Man” -- *The Saturday Evening Post*, October 1994
- “Call NASA!” -- *Resident & Staff Physician*, July 1995
- “‘Lou Gehrig’ Strikes Again” -- *The Saturday Evening Post*, July 1995
- “Shock Him!” -- *The Saturday Evening Post*, June 1996



On two occasions *The Saturday Evening Post* noted my medical story on the cover, shown below for May 1993 (“Guillain-Barre Syndrome”) and October 1994 (“Medical Mystery”).





Each of these twelve stories was published on my first try: no rejections. All are based on actual patients except “Lou Gehrig’ Strikes Again.” That one is a composite of patients, so is more in the realm of creative nonfiction. On April 8, 1995, I wrote in my journal:

I mailed *Lou Gehrig* story to the Saturday Evening Post. I am much more a central character than in the other stories, and in this regard, it is a more personal story. ... it has a surprising twist at the very end. I think the story is so good I briefly thought of sending it to *The New Yorker*, but ...they would never publish it. SEP may not publish it either, because it’s not a happy story, but at least they’ll read it. It’s long, 5500 words.

My comment about *The New Yorker* shows an early intolerance for time wasted on seeking publication. I did make occasional desultory efforts to find an agent and/or publisher for some books, but after a few rejections, I was done. After my experience with the two house-construction books, the *Pickwickian* book, and the aborted second edition of my physiology textbook, I did not have the will to chase after agents and publishers.

This meager effort is in contrast to many authors who will send dozens or even hundreds of query letters before giving up. Not me. I was not going to wait months just to see if some agent would respond, especially since many of them advertised “if you don’t hear from us within three months, we are not interested in your work.” How can they not even have the decency to send a generic rejection?

My negative attitude has continued to the present day. I’m aware that many highly successful authors suffered numerous rejections before finding a publisher: Stephen King, John Grisham, and JK Rowling, to name a few. For my later fiction that won Florida Writers Association awards, could I have found a traditional publisher if I had tried really hard? Perhaps, but I doubt it.

In addition to the twelve published medical stories, by 2000 I had eleven more unpublished ones, for a total of twenty-three, and I was primed for a second edition of the 1991 book. However, I needed a more eye-catching title; the first one, *Pickwickian*, was too obtuse. I thought the best title would be that of a story not yet published, “We Can’t Kill Your Mother!”, about an elderly, terminally-ill patient in our ICU whom we kept on a ventilator for two weeks. At that point, an out-of-town daughter showed up and demanded we take her mother off the ventilator -- *immediately*. My response gave the story its title.

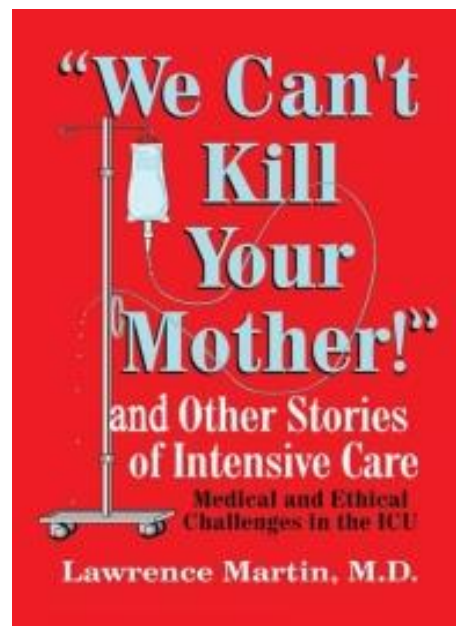
I did not feel up to another do-it-yourself self-publishing job. Amazon’s self-publishing platform, Create Space, was not yet in existence, and a few letters to traditional publishers yielded the same “not for us” responses. (That’s it. I’m done!)

I decided to go with a self-publishing company, one that would produce the book and, hopefully, sell a few copies. I chose Author House, a subsidiary unit of Author Solutions. I had the cover art from the same local artist who did the *Pickwickian* cover. I don’t remember exactly how much I paid to have the book published with Author House but recall it was between two and three thousand dollars.

At the time I knew very little (actually nothing) about Author Solutions, or its business model, and the experience helped to inform the next two decades of my self-publishing career.

We Can’t Kill came out in 2001, and then the Author House sales pitches began. Not to sell my book to the public, but to sell it *to me*. The business model of publishing imprints under Author Solutions (Author House, iUniverse, Xlibris, Trafford) and other so-called “vanity” publishers is to first charge the author to produce their book, then sell the book back to the author at a “discount.”

Once your book is produced, vanity publishing companies will also hound you with “marketing” schemes. One expensive option has been to include your book (with nineteen others) in a full-page ad in the prestigious *New York Times Review of Books*, published as a supplement in the Sunday newspaper. The cost per book is around three thousand dollars. Knowledgeable NYT *Book Review* readers know that the advertised books are all self-published, and I doubt very many books are sold from these ads. One reason is that the listed prices are often way above those for traditionally-published paperbacks. A recent check of vanity websites found many paperbacks in the \$20-\$30 range. With this markup the vanity companies can sell books back to the author at the purported “discount” and still make a nice profit per book. (Though I’ve removed my book from the Author House catalog, I notice it’s still listed on Amazon at the inflated price of \$19.95.)



There are self-publishing companies with a different and far more preferable business model: to sell your book to the public. You can search for these on the internet, using websites such as winningwriters.com. When you search for “best self-publishing companies,” avoid clicking on any Google link that is labeled “ad.” Those are likely to be set up by vanity publishers and lead you down a rabbit hole to their website, all in the guise of “best self-publishing companies.”

Since my experience with Author House, the method I have chosen is to use a la carte services as needed (e.g., cover design, editing, formatting), then publish on one of the available self-publishing platforms (e.g., Amazon’s KDP, Draft2Digital, Ingram Spark). This task can be accomplished within days (e-book) or a few weeks (print) of uploading your formatted manuscript and book cover.

The advantage of all self-publishing companies is that they are mostly hassle-free. Give them your money and they’ll produce your book. But you need to be hyper-aware of the nature of the company you sign with. Do your research before signing a contract. Likely the information you need is on the internet, somewhere.

Besides the author-disadvantaged business model discussed above, there are other issues you need to think about with all self-publishing companies.

- The total cost. We’re talking thousands of dollars per book, and there are many tales of authors paying up, then being asked for more.
- You may not own the copyright to your book once published. Check this out before signing any contract.
- The fee you pay may include services such as cover design, formatting, and producing a print-ready file, yet you may not “own” this work. Thus, if you want to get out of the contract after your book is published, the only thing the company may return to you is what you sent them, e.g., an unformatted Word file and no cover art. In that case you will have to start all over to prepare your book for self-publication.

If money is no object and you want one-stop shopping, then go with one of the self-publishing companies. But do your research first.

If you go with a self-publishing company, research the company before signing a contract.

If you want control over your work, and want to spend significantly less to produce your book, hire freelancers for the services you need and self-publish it on Amazon’s KDP platform, or one of the other self-publishing platforms mentioned above. Free lancers are easily found with an internet search. You can also find help for just about any task on fivrr.com.

Until I finally removed my book from the Author House catalog, I continued to get calls offering discounts from the inflated list price of *my book*. It wasn't just my own book that Author House wanted to sell me. They also offered "promotion packages" that always cost a minimum of three thousand dollars. After I turned down a couple of these "offers," I began getting calls from random *other* companies, offering to promote my book. I can only assume they got my name from Author House, since they had my phone number. The opening pitch was comical.

"Mr. Martin ["Dr. Martin" is on the cover], we have obtained an outside review of your book, and it is highly positive We think it will do well with our promotion."

"Oh? Which book is that?"

Pause. "We Can't Kill..."

"Have you had a chance to read it?"

"No, but our outside reviewer was impressed, and highly recommends it."

"Oh, who was that?"

"We don't give out that information, but they are experts in recognizing good books that should sell."

After some more back and forth, I ask the cost.

"Our basic package is \$3000, and it includes..."

I received this same pitch several times before and after retiring to Florida. The first few times I politely declined. The last time, feeling mischievous, I decided to turn the tables. After receiving the pitch from the female caller, I give my pitch.

"My publishing company Lakeside Press, offers two royalty programs. The first one gives you, the promotion company, 25% of all book sales you generate. There is no upfront cost. The second one offers you 50% of all book sales, but there is an upfront cost of \$3000. Which package would you be interested in?"

A few seconds of silence as the caller has never before encountered such a response. Then I state, "I can send you the proposals by email if you like. Just sign the contract, and return it with the stipulated fee, and we'll be good to go."

"Uh, we don't do that kind of business. We are offering..."

There is more back and forth as she tries to continue her sales pitch and I keep countering with my offers, ending with, "If you decide to take up one of my offers, let me know. Our company policy is not to spend any money upfront on promotion. But thanks for your call."

About this time, during the early months of the Covid pandemic, we were also getting many unsolicited "robo" calls for all sorts of scams. We no longer picked up landline calls, which had to go to voice mail, and at the same time I was able to block unregistered numbers on my iPhone. Robo-callers never left a message, but the book promoters did, and it was an actual human voice. "Just checking up with you, Mr. Martin. Please give me a call so we can discuss our promotion package. My number is..." They don't give up, but I do. I wasn't going to waste more time with them.

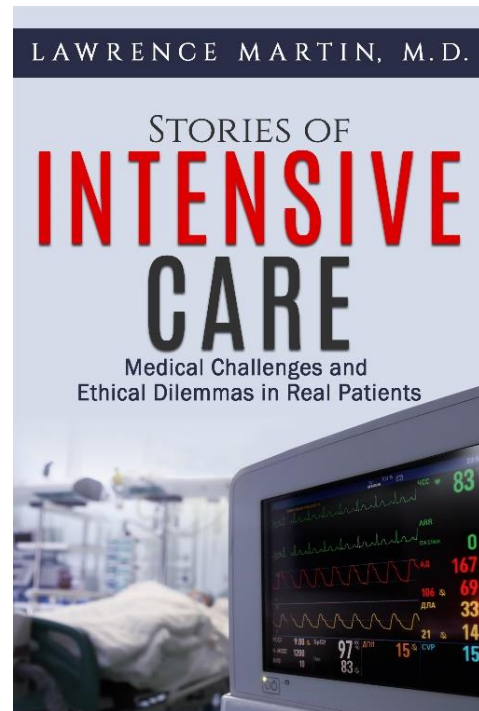
**If you receive a cold-call to promote your self-published book, hang up.
Guaranteed. Total. Waste. Of Money.**

We Can't Kill sold a few copies but, again, without advertising, and almost no reviews, I never recouped the money spent with Author House. Still, I have no regrets. Publishing with Author House in 2001 proved to be a valuable experience, if not a money-maker. It showed me there are better ways to produce my own books.

Postscript

After retiring to Florida, I had the opportunity to read the ICU stories in my critique group, and received some valuable suggestions. Based on this feedback I did some editing, updated medical information where needed, and decided to publish the stories in a new edition, with a new title, *Stories of Intensive Care: Medical Challenges and Ethical Dilemmas in Real Patients*. For this edition I chose the self-publishing platform Draft2Digital, which makes the book available on multiple outlets around the world.

And the paperback price? \$10.99.



John Kennedy Toole and *A Confederacy of Dunces*

When a true genius appears in the world, you may know him by this sign, that the dunces are all in confederacy against him.

Jonathan Swift, "Thoughts on Various Subjects, Moral and Diverting"

When you become "a writer" and experience repeated rejection, it is somewhat comforting to learn about successful writers whose first book was rejected multiple times. The list includes writing stars Stephen King, J.K. Rowling, John Grisham, James Patterson, and Dr. Seuss. Also, many bestsellers were initially self-published because no publisher recognized their commercial potential (e.g., *Fifty Shades of Grey*, *What Color is Your Parachute?*). Can we thus infer that a new writer's multi-rejected work still has hope, that agents and publishers can't really tell good from bad?

Well, not exactly. Agents state they can tell if the writing clicks after just a few pages read. And for the vast majority of submissions, they find the writing not good enough to read further,

On the other hand, the writing may be considered "good," but the agent/publisher finds some flaw that needs fixing, or doesn't see a potential market for the work or comes up with some other impediment to accepting the manuscript.¹ Thus, each new tale about agents and publishers turning down what ultimately became a bestselling book draws interest. One that draws perhaps the most interest is the novel by John Kennedy Toole, *A Confederacy of Dunces*.

In March 2016 my wife and I drove from The Villages to New Orleans, for a Road Scholar week in the city. We heard great music, took a trip on a Mississippi riverboat, and walked tourist-packed Bourbon Street. After an excellent lecture about the city's cultural history, I asked the speaker, "Is there one single book you would recommend about the city?" Without hesitation, she replied "*A Confederacy of Dunces*," a novel by John Kennedy Toole.

I ordered the book, but before reading it looked up Toole and learned he was born in 1937, wrote most of the novel while in the army in Puerto Rico, then finished it while working as a college professor back in New Orleans. For *A Confederacy of Dunces*, Toole was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1981—posthumously. His story, and the novel itself, fascinated me, given its unique history of rejection.

In February 1964, age twenty-seven, Toole submitted *Dunces* to publisher Simon & Schuster, where it caught the attention of famed editor Robert Gottlieb. (Gottlieb had shepherded Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* into production, and later became Editor-in-Chief of *The New Yorker*, and then head of Alfred Knopf Publishing.) Gottlieb considered Toole talented but felt his comic novel was, essentially, "pointless." Despite several revisions, Gottlieb remained unsatisfied, though he continued to correspond with Toole, asking for yet more changes. In one letter to Toole, Gottlieb wrote:

But that, all this aside, there is another problem: that with all its wonderfulnesses, the book—even better plotted (and still better

plotable)—does not have a reason; it's a brilliant exercise in invention, but unlike CATCH [22] and MOTHER KISSES and V and the others, it isn't *really* about anything. And that's something no one can do anything about.²

After more correspondence, with Gottlieb still not satisfied, Toole gave up and shelved the novel. Around this time, he also began to manifest severe depression and paranoia. After an argument with his mother, Thelma, Toole left home on a car trip around the country. On March 26, 1969, near Biloxi, Mississippi, he ran a garden hose from the exhaust of his car into his cabin and committed suicide. He was thirty-one years old.

Some years later, his mother found a carbon copy of the manuscript in a drawer. She took it to New Orleans author Walker Percy, a professor at Loyola University, and asked him to read it. He was well known and, she thought, could get it published. She was quite insistent, and to get rid of her he agreed to review the manuscript, not expecting to like it. But he did, and then tried to get it published with mainstream publishers in New York. All turned him down.

Given the local nature of the novel, Percy was finally able to get it published by Louisiana State University Press. *Dunces* came out in 1980 and won the Pulitzer Prize the following year.

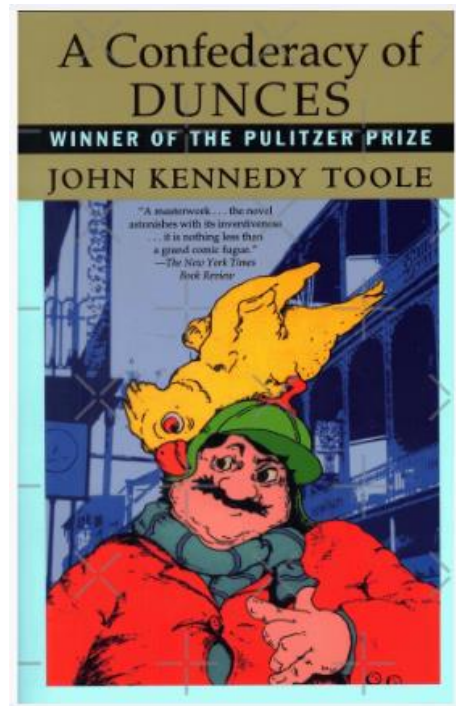
Did the book win the Pulitzer because of the author's tragic history? To prove some kind of point to Gottlieb and the publishing world? Did Gottlieb make a mistake in his criticism of the work?

And, on a personal level, did I read and enjoy it only because of all this history? If I had picked it up knowing nothing about the author, would I have maintained as much interest?

Good questions, and to a certain extent the answers are provided in a fortieth anniversary review of the book by Tom Bissell, published in *The New Yorker*.³

But first, a bit about the book for those who have not read it. The setting is New Orleans in the 1960s, the time and place where Toole lived. He infuses the work with New Orleans dialects, and much more about the city that led to our lecturer's recommendation. The novel's main character, Ignatius Reilly, is a "comic figure," obese, verbose, a buffoon type. He is steeped in medieval history and full of philosophical musings. There are other bizarre characters in the book, who do spout bizarre lines, including Reilly's erstwhile girlfriend, Mindy. It's the kind of book I found fun to read, though I see how Gottlieb could conclude it was "pointless." But, does every story have to make a point?

In *The New Yorker* article Bissell refers often to a 2012 biography of Toole, "Butterfly in the Typewriter," by Cory MacLauchlin. Based on his own observations and those of MacLauchlin, Bissell gives tentative answers to the questions raised above. About the Pulitzer Prize and post-publication acclaim:



Shorn of its unusual publishing history and its author's heartbreaking fate, it's hard to imagine it receiving anything resembling the acclaim that occasioned its 1980 publication, much less the Pulitzer Prize that it was awarded, by a jury eager to tweak the New York publishing leviathan. Toole would almost certainly have published better novels had he been given the opportunity to write them.³

About Toole's suicide:

[Toole] didn't kill himself merely because his novel went unpublished. In fact, most everything people have assumed about Toole's life (and death) is at least a little wrong. Shortly after its publication, the *Chicago Tribune* described "Dunces" as "a cry nobody heard," but the novel wasn't a product of despair. It was written, with discipline, by a confident, steadily ascending young man.³

About Toole's relationship with Robert Gottlieb:

Famously, Toole had a long correspondence with the editor Robert Gottlieb, then at Simon & Schuster, concerning "A Confederacy of Dunces."...Thelma portrayed Gottlieb as a villain whose rejection of "Dunces" all but condemned her son to death. In an interview, she monstrosly referred to him as "a Jewish creature" and "not a human being." What she didn't know, as MacLauchlin points out, was the degree to which Toole had confided in Gottlieb and others about his deteriorating home life. Writing to a friend, Toole complained that his mother "spends all her time telling me how stupid I am."³

Gottlieb requested that Toole come to New York so they could discuss "specific editorial suggestions." Somehow, Toole managed to screw this up. Twice he travelled to New York to see Gottlieb; twice the editor was out of town. On the second trip, Toole suffered a nervous breakdown in the Simon & Schuster office, which MacLauchlin views as the first outward sign of Toole's decline into madness. And yet Gottlieb continued to correspond with him. "I have to come out of this though, or I'll never do anything," Toole wrote to Gottlieb. "Please write me short or long at any time," Gottlieb responded. "Cheer up. Work." After their last exchange, Toole put "Dunces" in a box and began his final spiral toward infinity.³

Today there are over 1,500,000 copies of *Dunces* in print worldwide, in eighteen languages.⁴ This is somewhat surprising, since reviews when the book came out were mixed. After it won the Pulitzer Prize, a *The New York Times* article analyzed the initial reviews, stating: "although the reviews were unanimously favorable on balance, those that had anything critical to say were much more concrete about the novel's shortcomings than about its virtues."⁵

On balance, it seems likely that the unique history of the book certainly has influenced its continued popularity: rejection → author suicide → determined mother → Walker Percy signs on → more rejections → university press publication → Pulitzer Prize. But there is also something about

the novel itself that has kept it going all these years, which can be summed up in two words: comedic masterpiece.

What can we take from this tale? Assuming your work is actually reviewed by an agent or publisher, and it's then rejected, there are lots of possible reasons: the book is not for their target market; it won't sell enough to recoup publishing expenses; it needs too much work to get into shape; you're too old and they want an author with more books to come; etc. To me, *Confederacy* exemplifies a reality about the publishing industry, one that should give hope to the frustrated, rejected author.

Books that *should be published and could find an audience*, may still be rejected, for a variety of reasons. The author should not despair, but consider one of two options: further pursuit of agents and/or publishers (of which there are hundreds), or self-publish.

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1. <https://www.nytimes.com/1984/05/06/books/publishers-confessions-rejections-i-regret.html>
 2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Kennedy_Toole
 3. <https://www.newyorker.com/books/second-read/the-uneasy-afterlife-of-a-confederacy-of-dunces>
 4. <https://groveatlantic.com/book/a-confederacy-of-dunces/>
 5. <https://www.nytimes.com/1981/04/27/books/critic-s-note-book-the-cinderella-pulitzer-prize-novel-reconsidered.html>

Occupational Lung Disease: Civil Litigation and the Bias of Academicians – Part 1

The outcome of our home construction nightmare made me cynical about the justice system, but that was not the only reason. My experience reviewing occupational lung disease (OLD) claims was another.

Wherever you have the diagnosis of OLD you will find lawyers. They are either suing companies whose practices they claim led to OLD, or filing state claims on behalf of patients for workers' compensation (WC).

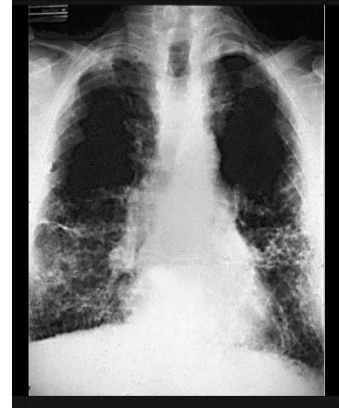
Throughout my career I was involved in evaluating these patients, to assess the validity of their lung disease claims. The two main diagnoses for which I wrote reports were coal workers' pneumoconiosis (scarring of the lungs from inhaled coal dust) and asbestosis (scarring of the lungs from inhaled asbestos). Less commonly, I evaluated claims for silicosis (scarring from inhaled silica dust) and for lung cancer attributed to the worker's job.

In my work for defense firms, I was asked to review claims to see if the diagnosis was supported by the evidence. If I thought the diagnosis was medically reasonable, I said so. However, the vast majority of claims were bogus *medically*; the diagnosis was simply made up by medical doctors hired by the law firms. There was no evidence for the disease named in the claim.

The bogus claim was usually based on a single chest x-ray report authored by the plaintiff law firm's hired doctor. He [they were all male] "over-interpreted" the chest x-ray to deliver the desired diagnosis. Never mind that several *other* chest x-rays of the patient, read by impartial radiologists, showed no occupational disease. Or that, in many cases, a chest CT scan, far more sensitive than a chest x-ray, also failed to show any occupational disease in the claimant.

To help orient the reader, below are two chest x-rays. The one on the left shows normal lungs: the large black areas behind the ribs. The pear-shaped white part in the middle, to the right of the central spine, is the heart. The chest x-ray on the right shows a case of asbestosis; the white mottling at the bottom-third of both lungs, on either side of the heart, is scarring from inhaled asbestos. Scarring of the lungs from any source, if widespread, can cause difficult breathing. In addition, scarring from asbestos presents an increased risk of developing lung cancer.

I took care of patients with true occupational lung disease, and saw the suffering it can cause. None of the claimants I was asked to evaluate were my "patients," and my reports only went to the referring attorneys. In a comment I will repeat in these pages, almost all of the claims were "manufactured" by doctors hired for this sole purpose.



The scam diagnoses were made on chest x-ray changes far more subtle than in the x-ray above. You can get tiny areas of scarring from just smoking, or from conditions totally unrelated to occupational asbestos inhalation, such as remote lung infections. No matter. Just about anything abnormal on a chest x-ray was read as asbestos disease, the predominant claim I was asked to evaluate. (In other venues the scam was built around diagnosing silicosis, a disease from inhaled silica dust.)

Despite all objective evidence being against the occupational claim, for an individual case it was impossible to prove intentional mis-diagnosis, as each case was perceived as only my opinion vs. another doctor's. However, in one well-documented situation, involving thousands of provably-bogus claims by a single x-ray interpreter, the physician actually lost his medical license. (Google "radiologist loses medical license over silicosis cases," or "The Silicosis Story: Mass Tort Screening and The Public Health.")

During my career I wrote hundreds of medical reports on these plaintiff-attorney-generated claims, challenging the diagnoses made by their doctor "experts." I worked hard to keep my reports objective, with facts and not unfounded opinions. In 1998 I submitted an article to The Cleveland State Marshall Law School's *Journal of Law and Health*, titled "Pitfalls in the Diagnosis of Occupational Lung Disease for Purposes of Compensation – One Physician's Perspective."

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|  CSU College of Law Library | Journal of Law and Health |
| Volume 13 Issue 1 | Article |
| 1998 | |
| Pitfalls in Diagnosis of Occupational Lung Disease for Purposes of Compensation - One Physician's Perspective | |
| Lawrence Martin Case Western Reserve University | |

In this twenty-page article, replete with footnotes, I characterized fourteen pitfalls, all of which I had encountered at some point in my evaluations. Here is the link to the article and its table of contents. <https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1212&context=jlh>

| PITFALLS IN DIAGNOSIS OF OCCUPATIONAL LUNG DISEASE FOR PURPOSES OF COMPENSATION—ONE PHYSICIAN'S PERSPECTIVE | |
|--|----|
| LAWRENCE MARTIN ¹ | |
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| N. <i>Using sloppy or incorrect language, including misspelling</i> | 65 |

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I came upon these pitfalls in analyzing the bogus medical diagnoses offered by plaintiff-attorney-hired doctors. Over time, as to be expected, I became known as a “defense doctor,” and in depositions for cases that went to trial, the plaintiffs’ lawyers loved to point this out. Whenever I saw a legitimate case, I said so; it was just that the vast majority of claims were not medically legitimate. What was my basis for this assessment?

- Extant chest x-rays of the claimant read by objective radiologists did not note any changes indicative of occupational lung disease.
- When a CT scan of the chest was available, it did not show changes indicative of occupational lung disease.
- Many of these claimants had extensive medical records for a variety of ailments. Invariably, these records revealed no mention of occupational lung disease. Nor, with very rare exception, was there even a history to suggest occupational lung disease. In other words, the patient never mentioned to his doctors anything about dust exposure, or express concern he may have lung disease from his job. In all cases the claim originated when the worker was contacted by the plaintiff attorneys, usually via the worker’s union.

- The plaintiff-attorney-hired doctors read the most minimal chest x-ray abnormality as “indicative of” or “diagnostic of” asbestosis, when in truth the abnormality could be from a large range of causes. Their obviously biased assessments – mentioning only one possible cause, the one sought by the plaintiff attorneys – would never be submitted to a panel of their peers.

I honed my writing skills in evaluating these claims. Had my reports been written for an objective medical panel, the medically-bogus claims would have been thrown out. But these cases were not adjudicated by any objective medical panel. They went before a lay jury, or an administrative judge without any medical background, and the bias was wholly on the claimant’s side. So, while the defense attorneys loved my work (and kept coming back for more), we were usually defeated by the judicial system. This is why so many companies went bankrupt defending occupational claims related to asbestos. The companies could either pay up or potentially lose more by going to court.

(See <https://institutelegalreform.com/wp-content/uploads/2003/01/StiglitzReport.pdf>.)

I am certainly aware that there has been fraud on the other side as well, that some companies hid information and needlessly exposed workers to harmful dusts. You can do an internet search for “companies hide information on dangers of inhaled dust” and read a vast literature on the subject. However, that does not translate into making any given claim medically valid.

Working in Ohio from 1976 to 2014, what I saw were predatory law firms manufacturing a huge number of cases that had no medical merit. I felt strongly about what amounted, in my view, to a giant diagnostic scam that was being supported – through unadmitted bias – by the academic establishment. So, I began to write about it, starting with letters to medical journals that refused to acknowledge the situation and instead published unscientific, biased articles relating to occupational lung disease diagnosis.

I also began extensive documentation on my website. Most of this posting took place in 2004-2005. A screen shot of the relevant links is below.

<http://www.lakesidepress.com/pulmonary/index-occup.html>

The screenshot shows a webpage with a white background and a red border. At the top, the title "Occupational Lung Diseases" is displayed in a large, bold, blue font. Below the title, there is a list of ten blue, underlined links. The links are: "Occupational Asthma", "Asbestos -- Index of Dr. Martin's web sites on asbestos", "Asbestos Diagnosis: ATS Official Statement 2004 -- a Flawed & Biased Statement", "Asbestos Diagnosis: ATS Official Statement 2004 -- Omitted References", "Asbestos Diagnosis: Origins of Anti-Science in the 2004 Official Statement on Asbestos Diagnosis", "Asbestos Diagnosis: Open Letter to American Thoracic Society (December 2004)", "Asbestos Junk Science -- Different Perspectives on the Internet", "Asbestos Litigation - Why it's a Medical Problem", "Asbestos Lung Disease - A Primer for Patients, Physicians and Lawyers", "Asbestos Lung Disease - case synopses", "Asbestos - internet links", "Asbestos Lung Disease - references", "Mass Screening for Asbestos Disease: A Medical Scam -- Powerpoint Presentation, July 20, 2005", "Silicosis - Medical Aspects (Powerpoint presentation, November 14, 2005)", "Mass Screening for Asbestos Disease: A Medical Scam -- Powerpoint Presentation, July 20, 2005", "United States Asbestos Screening Scam - References and Internet Sources", and "United States Asbestos Screening Scam - Analysis of Bogus Medical Reports".

The details of this effort will not be of much interest to the general reader, so in the following paragraphs I will just give a general overview of what went down. Anyone interested in more details, e.g., doctors or attorneys, can read through the above websites, or review the few documents I've posted in [Appendix C](#).

In September 2004, the prestigious American Thoracic Society, in its *Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine* (AJRCCM), published an "Official Statement" on diagnosis of non-malignant asbestos disease, i.e., asbestosis, the condition I was most often asked to evaluate. The 2004 Statement was an update from the last Official ATS Statement on asbestos disease, published in 1986.

The 2004 ATS Statement was flawed in numerous ways, starting with a total disregard for the large amount of information then extant on the diagnosis scam. Instead – unbelievably – it supported the scam by lowering the diagnostic standard for making a chest x-ray diagnosis of asbestosis, i.e., scarring of the lungs from inhaled asbestos. The 2004 Statement gave no explanation or rationale for lowering the standard from what it was in 1986. The new standard could now be applied to almost any non-specific x-ray with any markings at all, including people who had never even worked around airborne asbestos. In addition, unlike *every other article* posted in AJRCCM, the 2004 Official Statement did not list the "conflicts of interest" required for all authors.

On October 25, 2004, I sent a letter to AJRCCM pointing out this situation, and included 11 medical references. Within a day I received notice my letter was rejected for publication, without explanation. That's when I began posting information on my lakesidepress.com website, starting with an extensive post November 15, 2004; copied below is the Summary of that initial post.

American Thoracic Society Publishes Biased, Flawed Review of Non-Malignant Asbestos Disease

Medical Journal Violates Its Own Ethical Standard in Publication

Lawrence Martin, M.D., FACP, FCCP
(Member, ATS)

Summary

In September 2004 the American Thoracic Society published a long awaited update on diagnosis of nonmalignant asbestos diseases. Authored by 11 physicians, it appeared in the ATS publication, *Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine* (AJRCCM). The update covers developments over the past 2 decades and offers guidelines for diagnosis. By making statements regarding x-ray diagnosis that are unsupported (indeed contradicted) by the peer-review literature, and omitting numerous key references, the authors evidence bias in favor of mass screenings by plaintiff-attorney-hired physicians (PAHP). The vast majority of diagnoses by PAHP have been discredited as non-objective, but this is not mentioned by the ATS statement. Instead, the authors assume PAHP diagnoses are valid in making their recommendations. Apart from inherent bias in the article's content and presentation, AJRCCM also violated its own ironclad policy by not publishing the authors' conflict of interest statements.

I sent my website posting to AJRCCM and did not hear from them. I followed this up December 27, 2004 with an open letter to principals of ATS and its AJRCCM, detailing the bias in great detail, and providing nineteen references. This letter is in [Appendix C](#).
<http://www.lakesidepress.com/Asbestos/ATS-openletter.htm>

OPEN LETTER to:
Dr. Edward Abraham, editor-in-chief, AJRCCM
Dr. Sharon Rounds, president, ATS
Dr. Peter Wagner, president-elect, ATS

Lawrence Martin, M.D., FACP, FCCP

In my journal on December 28, 2004, I wrote my perception of the situation. I was not unaware of potential risks in taking on the medical establishment.

Altogether, I've sent out about 70 or 80 e-mail notices about the ATS letter. I'm probably not going to get any response, although this is a vacation week, and several auto replies indicate people are out until next week. Anyway, my aim is just to get the information out there, to provide intellectual ammunition for anyone who needs or can benefit from it. Although I never received any e-mail response from Mr. Bernstein [a defense attorney who wrote about the scam], my Asbestos Editorial web site showed up in his Pepperdine Law Review article.

I like to think of this exercise (50+ hours and counting!) as intellectual tour de force, a thorough deconstruction of the ATS's asbestos disease statement. I will likely never receive any e-mail commentary from ATS recipients (they not dare, for fear they might be quoted – I must be perceived as a loose cannon). Neither Setter nor Brickman nor Bernstein – three lawyers whose articles I quote and whom I've e-mailed several times – have ever contacted me or responded directly in any way. But what I've written is so solid, so well documented, there is simply no avoiding it if anyone is truly interested in the subjects (the ATS article; academic bias on asbestos; asbestos diagnosis in the screening program). There is simply nothing else like it. At some point, people engaging in the asbestos debates, or in any discussion of the ATS article, will have to take notice.

Riding to [work] today I fantasized that I will be vilified by the people I've criticized, that they will do a hatchet job on me, like the plaintiff lawyers try to do in depositions... that one or more doctors I've criticized will attempt to enlist a plaintiff's law firm to sue me for something or other. Those are my two concerns: personal calumny broadcast on the internet (instead of arguing with me on the merits), and litigation. Otherwise, I don't give a damn what they think. They are so biased that...they will never see the truth because of their intellectual dishonesty.

Postscript

In going over these materials almost two decades later, I've become aware how I was always into writing something. If not a full-length book, then short stories, letters to the editor, newsletters, or websites on a multitude of topics. My experience reinforces that timeless definition of writers, and by implication the difference between writers and non-writers.

Writers write.

Occupational Lung Disease: Civil Litigation and the Bias of Academicians – Part 2

A recap of Part 1:

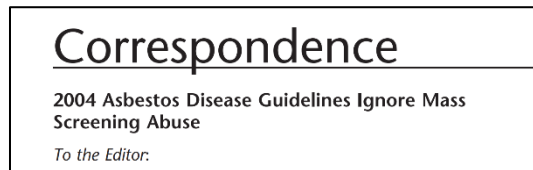
- In my medical career I found the vast majority of attorney-generated claims for occupational lung disease (OLD) were bogus. This assessment was based on several factors.
 - The claim was never initiated by the claimant himself, or by any physician connected with the patient. Instead, names were obtained from workers' unions, in industries where, in the past, there was potential exposure to friable asbestos. Thus, these claimants were not patients seeking care for some problem or complaint, but ex-workers recruited solely for the purpose of filing a claim.
 - Once the claimant signed on to the mass tort suit, a chest x-ray was taken and read by an attorney-hired doctor. When some x-ray abnormality was identified, only a single diagnosis was offered as possible cause, the one sought by the attorney. This was a clear deviation from acceptable medical practice, in that x-ray abnormalities *per se* are non-specific, and could be due to a variety of causes.
 - Reports of chest x-rays of the claimant, read by objective radiologists, mentioned no abnormalities to suggest OLD. In many cases a chest CT scan was available, and it showed no changes to indicate OLD
 - None of the claimants had a history of occupational lung disease in their medical records, which were often extensive, including hospitalizations for a variety of conditions.
- In October 2004, the major U.S professional lung disease organization, the American Thoracic Society, supported this diagnosis scam by publishing an unscientific and improperly documented "Official Statement" about diagnosis of asbestos disease. It was published in the Society's journal, the *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine* (AJRCCM).
- Following that ATS publication, on Oct 25, 2004, I sent a letter to AJRCCM pointing out problems with the Statement; my letter was immediately rejected.
- On Dec 27, 2004, I sent a more detailed letter to the leaders of ATS, pointing out the Statement's bias and errors in detail, and included 19 references.

As expected, my December 27, 2004, letter was not printed in AJRCCM, but there *was* a response from ATS president Dr. Sharon Rounds: a group email sent January 13, 2005 to various interested parties, myself included. I don't have this email but do have my reaction to it, in my journal entry of January 14, 2005.

Sharon Rounds "answered" my ATS criticisms with a group e-mail, received yesterday afternoon. Essentially it is a blanket denial, admitting only my point about lack of [conflict-of-interest] disclosure, saying ATS is working on this, and that they plan to publish disclosure statements March 1. It was a stupid e-mail, almost giving credibility to my web sites, even though she accused me of being "volatile" and "inflammatory."...She appended a short comment by [Dr.]

Guidotti, who simply ignored every point I made except one, and didn't respond to that one either. They are really dumb. She would have been better off ignoring me, instead of saying ATS stands fully behind the article, since it's provably in error in many places. My web sites are out there, and she's acknowledged (indirectly) that they bite. If anyone is interested, the information is clear, concise, and the charge of bias is proved. If people are not interested, then it's moot -- nothing I can do about it.

Seeing the hopelessness of the situation, I did not reply to Dr. Rounds. Then, without prior notice, my *first letter* from October 25, 2004, was printed in the February 2005 issue of AJRCCM, along with another letter critical of the ATS Official Statement.

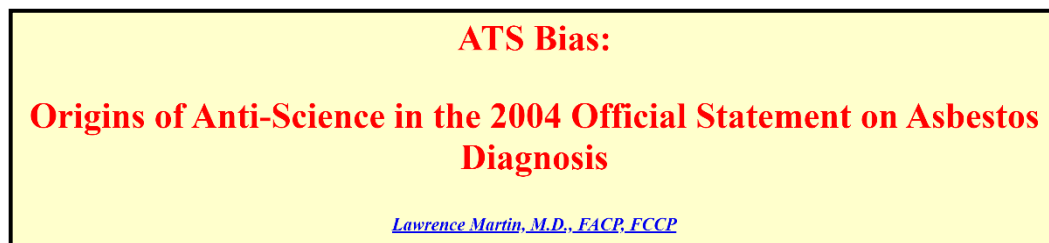


AJRCCM also appended “conflict of interest” statements in its response. The two letters and the ATS response are in [Appendix C](#); they can also be viewed online at <https://www.atsjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1164/ajrccm.171.6.950>.

AJRCCM's response to these two letters only served to obfuscate the central issues: 1) No explanation of why the diagnostic chest x-ray standard was lowered; 2) no acknowledgment of the rampant diagnosis scam that was by then prodigiously documented in both medical articles and the lay press; 3) no explanation of why conflict of interest statements were omitted when the Official Statement was published in September 2004.

While the ATS response did include conflicts of interest for each author of the 2004 Statement, it did so in a manner to defy easy reading: one giant single paragraph, tiny-font, no-indentation (see [Appendix C](#) or the link above). This suggests the editors wanted to make it difficult for readers to plow through the listings. I did my own investigation and found numerous potential conflicts of interest for nine authors that should have been mentioned in the original 2004 Statement. I documented the conflicts of interest for these authors and posted them on my website.

<http://www.lakesidepress.com/Asbestos/ATS-biases.htm>

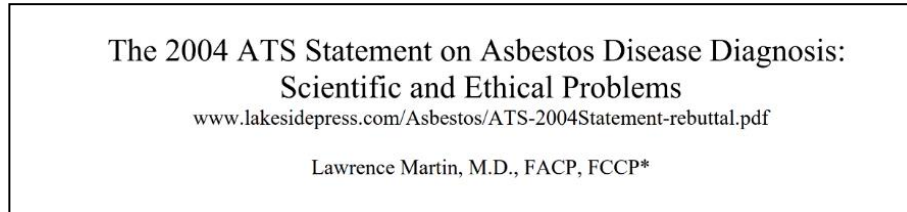


After documenting all the conflicts of interest, I wrote:

My charge is very specific. Otherwise reputable physicians and scientists have abandoned science because of their political and economic biases over asbestos. In their quest to pursue an “agenda” on asbestos, they have winked at or ignored flagrant violations of scientific principle. Their bias has distorted an important review article, and sullied ATS’s credibility in the one area where it is most needed.

I was not done. In April 2005, I posted a *thirty-five-page* rebuttal of the 2004 ATS Statement. It is online at:

<http://www.lakesidepress.com/Asbestos/ATS-2004Statement-rebuttal.pdf>



By April of 2005, when I posted the above rebuttal statement, many other physicians had recognized the incredible bias of the ATS Official Statement. I included two of those criticisms on page 5 of my rebuttal; below is a relevant quote from each.

“To disregard the evidence [regarding chest x-ray interpretation] discredits the American Thoracic Society as a scientific body.” (Weill 2005)

“In our opinion [the official ATS Statement] did not fully consider alternative points of view and all of the available literature in several important areas. We take no satisfaction in concluding that the process leading to this Statement has failed to result in a useful and credible summary of current knowledge on causal aspects of asbestos related health effects.” (Ghio and Roggli, 2005)

The American Thoracic Society was not the only organization supporting the diagnosis scams by publishing biased articles. I also found tacit support from another professional lung disease organization, the American College of Chest Physicians, and its journal *Chest*. In 2004, *Chest* came out with a peer-reviewed article about asbestos diagnosis that can best be described as “junk science.”

The authors used the huge number of provably-bogus asbestos diagnoses, generated by lawyers and their doctor-shills, to opine about the “rising incidence of asbestos lung disease.” This seemingly benign statement shows incredible bias; it assumes that *every plaintiff-attorney-generated diagnosis of asbestos disease was accurate and legitimate*.

I wrote a letter to *Chest*, expressing my concerns. *Chest*’s editor-in-chief rejected my letter, stating in his reply to me: “The ACCP and *Chest* do not wish to enter into any more asbestos controversy. Sorry.”

Okay, no surprise there. Under the title “Medical Journal Publishes ‘Junk Science’ Asbestos Article,” I put the details of this sad situation on my website, at <http://www.lakesidepress.com/Asbestos/Chest/overview.htm>. The introduction is in [Appendix C](#).

With the publications in AJRCCM and *Chest*, corruption of the diagnostic process for occupational lung disease had reached the highest levels of academia, There was nothing more I could do about it, except post the information on my website.

For the record, I never thought that the editors of these medical journals, or the ATS officials, were in cahoots with the plaintiff attorneys; that is, I never thought they were “paid off” to publish junk science or provably biased articles. It was just that they willfully ignored all evidence of the diagnosis scam, and let their bias in favor of “the workers” and against “the employers” infect their publications. In a nutshell, they were not interested in putting out objective information relating to the diagnosis of occupational lung diseases. Under the guise of scientific, peer-reviewed articles, they put out obviously biased, *unscientific* articles. I lost respect for these editors and academic leaders.

Because of my websites and involvement in OLD litigation, I was invited to give talks in both Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles, as well as Cleveland. My November 2005 talk in Los Angeles was on the silicosis-diagnosis scam, then rampant across the country. I always made my PowerPoint talks simple and objective, though on this last point I’m sure plaintiff lawyers would disagree. I pointed out that the silicosis scam was not obscure by any means, that it was well publicized in many media outlets. Below are two slides from the 2005 talk. The left slide gives news headlines about the scam involving inhaled silica dust. The right slide refers to federal judge Janis Jack’s 2005 ruling that thousands of these silicosis diagnoses were fraudulent.

Dallas Ft Worth Star-Telegram, February 17, 2005
"Judge calls diagnoses methods frightening"
+++++

Mobile Register, March 13, 2005
Doctor's testimony ignites legal storm

Fortune, June 13, 2005
Diagnosing for Dollars

Client Alert, July 14, 2005
• **2005 Multidistrict Litigation Order Criticizes Thousands of Silicosis Claims**
=====

Wall Street Journal, August 12, 2005
Silicosis Scandal

New York Times, October 9, 2005
The Tort Wars, at a Turning Point

Plaintiff-attorney-manufactured process for silicosis is same as for asbestosis cases

- "The significance of Judge Jack's order goes far beyond the silicosis cases... Given that asbestosis cases used the same techniques to recruit plaintiffs and used the same medical screeners, [I'm] confident that if the same level of discovery were permitted with respect to asbestosis claims, the same kind of evidence of fraud on a massive scale would be uncovered."
-- Professor Lester Brickman, Cardozo Law School

Since my 2005 talk, the information has continued to accumulate about OLD diagnosis scams. See:

- <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB123905959870594889>.

- <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-109hrg30631/html/CHRG-109hrg30631.htm>
- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6170113/>
- <https://www.csx.com/index.cfm/about-us/media/press-releases/csx-concludes-racketeering-and-fraud-litigation-against-asbestos-lawyers/?mobileFormat=false>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/03/opinion/nocera-the-asbestos-scam.html>
- <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887323864304578318611662911912>

If these diagnostic scams were so well known and documented, why was there no legislative attempt to rein them in, to put a stop to the fraudulent claims generated by plaintiff attorneys? Good question. I will leave it up to the reader to ponder why not.

For the few cases that actually ended up in court, as defense expert I usually gave a video deposition. I only recall going into the courtroom for live testimony twice, and both times it was a frustrating experience. The defense attorney asked for my “opinion within reasonable medical certainty,” but I could not explain to the jury why I had such an opinion, or why the opposing opinion was medically bogus. It would have taken more time than I was allowed, and the defense attorney just wanted my summary opinion on the record. Then the prosecuting attorney would get on his high horse and ask, “Dr. Martin, what percent of your reports are for the defense?” smirking at my honest answer because it could only mean that *I* was biased.

When I turned to writing fiction, including the novels *Consenting Adults Only* and *The Wall: Chronicle of a Scuba Trial*, my experience with civil litigation proved very helpful.

Postscript

When the anti-science bias of another medical journal was exposed during the Covid-19 pandemic, I was not surprised. I had been through that mill a decade and a half earlier, and seen how academicians can hide behind their credentials to mislead and misinform. In this case, it was a multi-authored statement published February 2020 in *The Lancet*, a well-regarded British medical journal. Twenty-seven public health scientists signed a letter stating they “overwhelmingly conclude that this coronavirus originated in wildlife” and not from China’s Wuhan Virus Lab. No discussion on evidence for a lab origin was offered. Furthermore, they wrote that it was a “conspiracy” to suggest that the origin was from the Wuhan Lab.¹

Omitted from *The Lancet* letter was the conflict of interest of several signers, including the head of the commission that “investigated” the virus’s origin. Turns out he had “extensive financial ties to the Wuhan Lab.”²

The February 2020 letter in *The Lancet* was ultimately exposed as anti-science propaganda aimed to shut down any criticism of the Wuhan Lab over the virus’s origin.³⁻⁴

With full exposure of the authors' conflicts of interest, and the unscientific way they reached their conclusion, *The Lancet* finally wised up. In September 2021 the journal published a letter by scientists stating: "There is so far no scientifically validated evidence that directly supports a natural origin.... Overwhelming evidence for either a zoonotic or research-related origin is lacking: the jury is still out."⁵

Thus, regarding a natural origin of the Covid virus, *The Lancet* went from "overwhelmingly conclude" to "no scientifically validated evidence." Unfortunately, by then the damage had been done. The 2020 letter had virtually shut down debate among scientists and in the media. One review, in the *British Medical Journal*, was headlined:⁶

The covid-19 lab leak hypothesis: did the media fall victim to a misinformation campaign?

BMJ 2021 ; 374 doi: <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n1656> (Published 08 July 2021)

The, *BMJ*'s answer was, unequivocally, "yes."

1. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)30418-9/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)30418-9/fulltext)
2. <https://www.nationalreview.com/the-morning-jolt/the-lancet-gives-up-on-covid-19-origins/>
3. <https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/557625-who-adviser-accuses-critics-of-covid-lab-leak-theory-of-thuggery/>
4. <https://www.bmj.com/content/375/bmj.n2414>
5. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(21\)02019-5/fulltext#%20](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(21)02019-5/fulltext#%20)
6. <https://www.bmj.com/content/374/bmj.n1656>

The lesson from these two widely spaced and on the surface totally different episodes – the lung disease diagnosis scam and the Covid-conspiracy charge – is that academics and scientists can let major biases infect their pronouncements. When the results of those biases become evident – e.g., omission of conflict-of-interest statements, ignoring key articles and references, arbitrarily changing diagnostic standards, refusing to respond to rebuttals – it should make one skeptical about other "official" statements.

Academics and scientists who take a position in a controversial area may not be forthright with their biases or conflicts of interest. Be skeptical of "official" statements and pronouncements.

Richmond Heights Hospital Newsletter

After Mt. Sinai Hospital closed in February 2000, I joined the staff of University Hospitals of Cleveland (UH). This was a period of hospital closures and consolidations and Cleveland emerged with two large medical centers, the Cleveland clinic and UH. The Clinic is about twice as large in staff and beds, but UH is also quite large, with several hospitals in the metropolitan area. UH is also the main teaching arm of Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine, where I was a clinical professor of medicine.

Starting in early 2000, I worked first in a small UH-run hospital, in Richmond Heights, a Cleveland suburb. In December 2002 I accepted a staff position as head of Utilization Review in this hospital. UR was tasked with monitoring and advising on hospital length of stay, which greatly affected Medicare reimbursement.

At the time Medicare recognized two categories of admissions, “inpatient” and “observation.” Two patients could be admitted with the identical diagnosis, to the same ward, receiving the same nursing and medical care – but billed differently depending on the admitting designation. If the patient was labeled “inpatient” the hospital would be paid more, but then would be dinged if the stay was longer than Medicare guidelines. If the patient was labeled “observation” the hospital would be paid a lot less, but would again lose money if the stay was too long. Only “inpatient” status counted in length-of-stay statistics, so it was a fine line in deciding what label to use on admission. Ideally, you wanted to have the right mix of inpatient and observation patients.

This scheme made little sense, considering there was literally no difference in any aspect of the care between the two categories. Still, doctors had to try to figure out what category to use. The goal of my committee was to monitor all this activity, meet weekly, and report to hospital administration.

A year into this job I got the idea of publishing a quarterly Utilization Review newsletter for the hospital medical staff. The goal was ostensibly to keep people abreast of our UR committee’s work, so it was in the purview of my job. However, from the beginning, I decided the newsletter had to be interesting, and that meant two things. One, it had to be well written – no platitudes or corporate-speak one often found in company missives. And two, it should include articles about our staff, so in every issue I wrote a profile of one of our physicians, and made sure to include lots of pictures.

I enlisted the help of Karen, our excellent Dept. of Medicine Secretary, to help with formatting, proofreading, and getting the thing printed. It came back as a magazine-style glossy, which was then mailed to all the staff (not emailed).

The first issue, in April 2004, was eight pages. I wrote in my journal at the time.

I have spent several hours this week on the Richmond Heights Utilization Review newsletter, which is time-consuming to get the formatting right. It’s up to 8 pages

and we are using Microsoft Publisher. Has taken much longer to set and format than to write! It's coming along nicely though -- looks good

For the next issue, on July 27, 2004, I wrote:

The newsletter is coming along nicely. I am spending more time on it as we get closer to our self-imposed deadline...it's up to 12 pages, and I could even make it longer, that's how much material I can generate. But I will stop at 12 pages for this issue. There is much anticipation, at least from the administration, over the newsletter. I am careful to involve a lot of people, to help generate interest. I create the stories and write virtually every word...And I already have a bunch of ideas for next issue, too...

The newsletter proved a hit with Administration and the medical staff. But was not without issues. Usually the physician articles went smoothly – who doesn't want to be profiled? – but once I ran into a roadblock. For a 2005 profile, a doctor's work history had some gaps I wanted to fill in. I wrote then:

Last night I called [Dr. X] because there's some things I don't understand about his work in the 90s. He got very defensive, and sort of hung up. I won't pursue it. Seems he really didn't do much clinical those years. I must have come across like an investigative reporter, and he reacted. I was probably too overbearing. I e-mailed him afterwards and said if he wanted to tell me more, fine, if not I would just go with what we have.

Other annoyances crept up with later issues. The following diary entries show my arc of enthusiasm turn downward.

Journal entry -- March 18, 2005:

Am meeting with [Dr. B] today, to interview her for next newsletter. None of the people who promised articles have come through yet, not one...This newsletter is getting old, if it is to be a burden each time I want to do one.

Journal entry -- April 20, 2005:

I've also been working diligently on the newsletter. K has been very busy, but has helped a little. We keep finding misspellings, and other snafus missed the first or 2nd time around.

Journal entry -- January 29, 2006:

...this week I began creating a new edition of the newsletter. Monday I interviewed [Dr. R]. Since then I've created half a dozen articles, given out some 'assignments' and generally got the ball rolling again. It's a process of accretion. I just start adding pages, editing, deleting, adding, etc. I've spent 1-2 hours on this every day since Monday.

Journal entry -- February 17, 2006:

I've been working on newsletter quite a bit this week, and hope to have a final draft on Monday. K is helping a little, but basically it's a one-man show. My

special [item] this issue is a compilation of computer programs that doctors use at RHH. I've also included a medical crossword puzzle. The newsletter is maxed out at 22 pages now.

Journal entry January 12, 2007:

...Karen and I 'finished' the newsletter today... We'll send it to the printer tomorrow. Not one of the best issues, but I'm tired of running after people to get in their articles, etc. I put in (at Karen's suggestion) the picture of all of us in Nagpur dressed in Indian regalia. I'm looking forward to being finished with the newsletter, and concentrating on the sleep boards...

Journal entry May 30, 2007:

Karen asked me about the newsletter... I've been postponing it for so long. I guess I will do another one this June, to get it out of the way. I really don't have the time... not with all the legal work and the sleep [boards] review I have to do.

Journal entry July 2, 2007:

...I'm dragging my feet [on the newsletter]... Tired of it, because I don't have the time, and it's a waste of time anyway. Feel obligated, but too much work going after people, re-writing their stuff, editing, proofing, etc. Don't want to do it anymore, and neither does Karen.

Journal August 6, 2007:

...I have so much to do and no time to do it. Several legal cases [to work on]... Newsletter is a royal pain.

After the last edition in 2007 my UR job ended, and with it the newsletter. UH administration figured, rightly, that whatever benefit was obtained from the UR committee's work wasn't worth the cost of maintaining my position. Since the newsletter was tied to my position, it went too. I was not unhappy with this turn of events. I had become board certified in sleep medicine during 2007 (see next chapter), and was now very busy with clinical work, interpretation of sleep studies, and legal and occupational medicine reports.

Although the journal entries quoted above show increasing annoyance with the newsletter, the fact is, at least in the beginning, it was a labor of love. I was writing for a general audience, not lawyers or medical journals, and it was fun. What soured me ultimately was the time it took to do it right, and the difficulty of running after people for contributions.

If you decide to write a newsletter for your organization, don't underestimate the amount of work involved. Not just the writing, but the proofreading, the formatting, the distribution. Above all, make sure it is readable and is of interest to your intended readers. Add pictures of people if feasible.

Postscript

Richmond Heights Hospital was a small suburban unit of the University Hospitals (UH) system. Population decline and system-wide consolidation of the two big Cleveland-area medical centers (UH and Cleveland Clinic) led to the closure of at least seven hospitals in the years we worked in Cleveland. UH closed the doors on Richmond Medical Center December 2022, eight years after I retired.



Sleep Boards

No, not wooden mattresses. Boards as in “board exams.”

Adult pulmonary medicine is one of several specialties that builds on basic training in internal medicine. I was a pulmonologist for adults. There are also pulmonologists for children, and their specialty training comes after basic training in pediatrics.

At each step of training, doctors must take “board exams” in their specialty, passage of which shows they are qualified for that specific area of practice. My first board exam was a two-day affair for internal medicine. Then, after pulmonary training, I had a one-day board exam in that specialty.

These are tough exams. Not passing one can harm your career. For example, to have a hospital-based position you pretty much need to be board certified in your specialty.

I passed the pulmonary medicine boards in 1976. After that, I thought I was done with these grueling, all-day tests. But as the practice of pulmonary medicine evolved to include more work in intensive care, so did board exams. A new “board specialty” came into being: critical care medicine. Since I was head of Mt. Sinai’s ICU, it was an exam I needed to take, or risk losing that particular position. (I could have continued the general practice of pulmonary medicine without the critical care boards.)

For a year before the exam, I boned up on every aspect of critical care. When exam time came, November 10, 1987, I was prepared and passed with proverbial flying colors. Whoopee!

But this new critical care exam was different. Unlike the internal medicine and pulmonary boards, which were “for life” the critical care board had to be renewed every decade. That meant another exam in 1997. I passed that one also.

It didn’t stop. By the late 1990s, another new specialty was evolving for which some pulmonologists were heavily involved: sleep medicine. The most serious and prevalent condition dealt with in sleep medicine was (and remains) sleep apnea, where people stop or slow their breathing during sleep. Diagnosis requires a “sleep test,” whereby patients are monitored for their brain waves (EEG), breathing, heart rate, and oxygen level during sleep. If they have sleep apnea, treatment is typically with a “CPAP mask,” which the physician prescribes. The mask is connected to a machine that blows air into the patient’s lungs with each breath.



Sleep medicine proved to be a lucrative business and hospitals across the country rushed to set up two-to-four bed sleep facilities. Most were within the hospital itself, but some were free-standing. Because the main reason for the test was to diagnose sleep apnea, pulmonologists ended up as medical directors for most of these labs.

Of course, the field of sleep medicine also involves other diagnoses, such as insomnia, narcolepsy, and restless legs syndrome, But the money was always in sleep apnea; without that diagnosis and its huge prevalence in the population, there would have been no sleep labs nor a new specialty of “sleep medicine.”

Each sleep test lasted six to eight hours and generated a mountain of data, which had to be “interpreted.” This task fell to myself and fellow pulmonologists. Not only was it another source of income, but it was much easier than working in the ICU. We could interpret tests of patients who were sent to the lab by other physicians, write up our report and bill for the effort. Thus, it came to be, in the 1990s and early 2000s, that many older pulmonary physicians like myself moved away from intensive care and toward the practice of sleep medicine.

The very first sleep medicine board exam was announced in 2005, to take place nationwide in November 2007, when I would be 64 years old. A good friend, an orthopedic surgeon, had retired at age 60. Other physicians my age were winding down also, and planned to retire well before age 70. What was I going to do?

If I wanted to continue reading these sleep tests and practice sleep medicine, I needed to become board certified. That meant studying outside my own field of pulmonary medicine. Way outside. While pulmonary physicians dominated the practice of sleep medicine, the field itself was by no means all pulmonary, or even mostly pulmonary. The following specialties all had a hand in developing the new sleep medicine board exam:

- American Board of Internal Medicine
- American Board of Family Medicine
- American Board of Otolaryngology
- American Board of Pediatrics
- American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology

From the specialties involved, it was clear the exam would include pediatrics, plenty of neurology, and a fair amount of otolaryngology (ear, nose, throat). Study guides for the boards showed that the subject of “sleep apnea” might be, at most, twenty percent of the exam. For pulmonologists, the test would be no slam dunk.

In thinking back to 2005-2006, I had not the slightest interest in retiring. Nor in taking critical care boards again. I was easing out of the ICU, and spending more time in sleep medicine. I would go for it.

I had two years to prepare and went full stop. First, I created multiple websites about sleep medicine, mainly to teach myself aspects of the subject. I wrote sites for both doctors and patients, learning something each time. Here’s the headline of my patient-oriented site.

Sleep Disorders: For Patients And Their Families

Lawrence Martin, M.D.

Clinical Professor of Medicine

Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine, Cleveland
Board Certified in Pulmonary and Sleep Medicine

[Sleep Home Page](#) / [Internet Sleep Links](#) / [Index of Dr. Martin's web sites](#)

I found interesting cases about sleepwalking as a murder defense and wrote about that as well, starting off with a quote from Macbeth.

Can sleepwalking be a murder defense?

Lawrence Martin, M.D., FACP, FCCP

Associate Clinical Professor of Medicine

Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine, Cleveland
Board Certified in Pulmonary and Sleep Medicine

[Internet Sleep Links](#) / [Books about sleep disorders \(with links to Amazon.com\)](#) / [Drugs for Sleep & Awake](#) / [Index of Dr. Martin's web sites](#)

from Shakespeare's Macbeth, Act 5, Scene 1:

Enter a Doctor of Physic and a Waiting-Gentlewoman

DOCTOR: I have two nights watched with you, but can perceive no truth in your report. When was it she last walked?

GENTLEWOMAN: Since his majesty went into the field, I have seen her rise from her bed, throw her night-gown upon her, unlock her closet, take forth paper, fold it, write upon't, read it, afterwards seal it, and again return to bed; yet all this while in a most fast sleep.

DOCTOR: A great perturbation in nature, to receive at once the benefit of sleep, and do the effects of watching! In this slumbry agitation, besides her walking and other actual performances, what, at any time, have you heard her say?

GENTLEWOMAN: That, sir, which I will not report after her.

DOCTOR: You may to be: and 'tis most meet you should.

GENTLEWOMAN: Neither to you nor any one; having no witness to confirm my speech.

Enter LADY MACBETH, with a taper

Lo, you, here she comes! This is her very guise; and, upon my life, fast asleep. Observe her; stand close.

DOCTOR: How came she by that light?

GENTLEWOMAN: Why, it stood by her; she has light by her continually; 'tis her comand.

DOCTOR: You see, her eyes are open.

GENTLEWOMAN: Ay, but their sense is shut.

<http://www.lakesidepress.com/pulmonary/Sleep/sleep-murder.htm>

The answer to the question in the title is “possibly.” It has prevailed in some cases, but not in others. I discuss this information in the website.

In addition to creating numerous websites about sleep disorders, I also went through every practice exam that was available. And, I took courses in reading raw sleep data, including one in Medford, Oregon!

Exam time came and I passed with a score in the top one-third. Within a week of learning the results, I got a call from the hospital where I read sleep studies. “Dr. Martin, are you board-certified in sleep medicine? If so, send us the confirmation.” If not, no doubt I would have been removed from that lab.

I was set for retirement in a few years, so this would be my last board exam. Although I was now board-certified in sleep medicine, I was in no way an expert in the field, since I was a late-comer to it and did no research on sleep disorders. But I was a writer, and my writing on sleep topics ended up attracting one of the nation’s leading sleep specialists.

Sleep Medicine Review

One of my internet articles on sleep medicine was “What to study for the sleep medicine boards.” I listed specific resources, including the standard textbook of sleep medicine, *Principles and Practice of Sleep Medicine*, created and edited by Dr. Meir H. Kryger. All the contributors to this textbook, over multiple editions, are experts in the field.

My website caught the attention of Dr. Kryger, then a professor at Yale. He called one day and said he’d like to send me samples of a new book he was putting together, called *Sleep Medicine Review: A Problem-Oriented Approach*. Would I look them over and see what I thought? He wanted his new book to be included in my recommended study list.

The samples he sent were rough drafts of the questions and answers that needed a fair amount of editing for clarity. By that point I had a lot of experience writing medical questions for teaching purposes, and I rewrote several of the items. This must have impressed him, because he then asked me to join in writing the book!

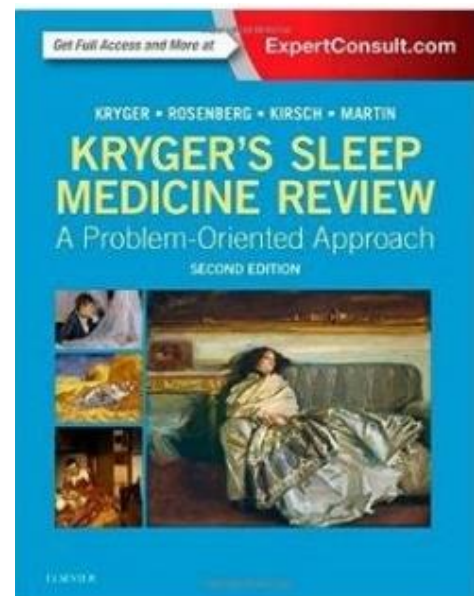
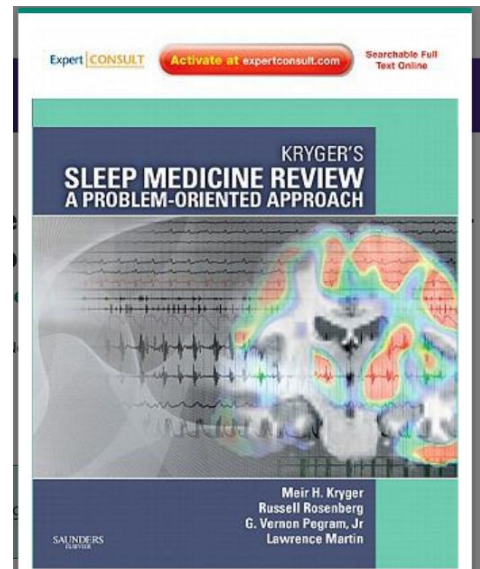
Thus, I became one of four authors of his new textbook. The first edition, by Elsevier Publishers, came out June 2011 (top photo). I also co-authored the second edition, which came out in 2015 (bottom photo). By the time of the third edition, 2019, I was retired from medicine and did not contribute.

My authorship was not a royalty arrangement, but a one-time payment of \$3000 for each edition.

Sleep Medicine Review was my last non-fiction book, except for a revision of the ICU stories book that I published in early 2020: *Stories of Intensive Care: Medical Challenges and Ethical Dilemmas in Real Patients*

<https://www.amazon.com/Stories-Intensive-Care-Challenges-Dilemmas-e-book/dp/B07Q1D9GCN/>

Now I was ready to try fiction. But first, a little bit about Savannah.



Savannah – a Bit of History

As a kid I had an obsession about my hometown, a mostly negative one.

My father was born in Russia in 1910, somewhere near Minsk we were told. His family – he was the youngest of eight children – escaped the pogroms and emigrated to New York City in 1913.

My father's family was prototypical poor Jewish immigrants in Manhattan's lower East Side. Though Dad was smart, for whatever reason never went beyond high school. He drifted through a series of menial jobs, including a stint in the Civilian Conservation Corps.

My mother was born in 1914, in New York City. Her family was middle class, also living in the lower East Side. The Depression came, and she moved to Savannah, where she had some relatives. Then my father came down, around 1935, because he also had a relative in Savannah – and there he found some work. Harry and Sadie met, both Jewish and from lower Manhattan; they married in May 1937. Bob was born 1939, me in 1943, and Bernie in 1947.

My parents, neither one college educated nor with any special skills, managed a middle-class existence and raised three boys who turned out well (subject to debate). Dad was a traveling salesman, peddling dry goods four days a week in towns within a day's drive of Savannah. He would leave on Monday, come home on Thursday, or sometimes Friday. Mom was a bookkeeper for a wholesale kitchen supplier. She never learned to drive, so she took the bus to work when Dad was out of town, which was at least four days a week.

We never went hungry or lacked basic necessities. But we also had little discretionary money. An attic fan but no air conditioning. Vacations to stay with relatives in New York. No summer camp for the kids. No piano in the house (more about that later).

My parents liked Savannah, the easy living compared to NYC, the warm climate, the friendly neighbors. My beef with the city was that it was economically backward, didn't seem to be growing and was, in a word, stifling. I would have loved, as a kid, to be able to get on a subway and zip into Manhattan.

Every day I read *The Savannah Morning News*. And every story about the city was the same: What's not coming to town, what's not being developed, what's not happening. I contrasted this situation with Atlanta, a booming metropolis. That's what I wanted!

I was a nerd about geography and demographics, intrigued by the fact that Savannah's two coastal rival cities – Jacksonville to the south and Charleston to the north – were growing, while Savannah was not. In 1950, the three cities had about the same metropolitan population. While the other two grew, Savannah simply stagnated, went nowhere.

So, I complained. A lot. My parents tuned me out, though sometimes my father would make up a reason: "Savannah can't grow with all the marshland surrounding the city," he'd say. Nonsense, of course. The real reason was head-in-the-sand community leaders – they didn't want growth, didn't want business competition, For whatever reason(s), they just seemed to want Deep South stagnation, at least that was my take at the time. That Savannah is now a major

tourist mecca came about partly through local planning, but mainly through unplanned outside forces.

Unlike Atlanta, Charleston, Columbia, and other southern cities, Savannah was spared destruction during the Civil War. When General Sherman arrived in December 1864 with his 62,000-man army, he found the vastly outnumbered Confederate forces had skedaddled out of town to avoid certain defeat. Thus, left intact for posterity was a square mile of nineteenth century homes and other buildings, between the Savannah River and Forsythe Park.

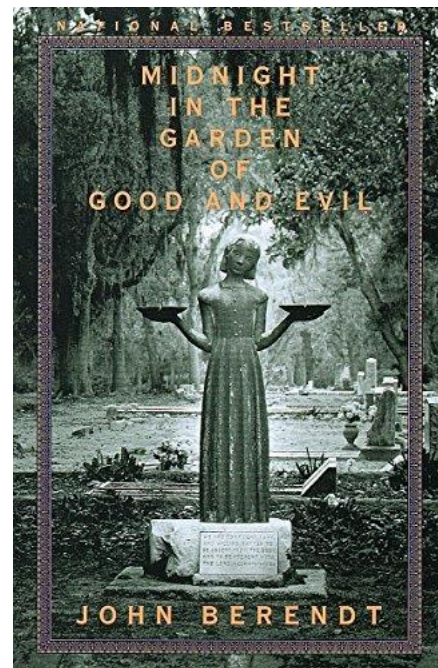
A group of citizens managed to take control of this “historic area” in the 1950s, to keep it from being torn down and replaced by parking lots, and set about an ambitious plan to restore many of the century-old buildings. (As a kid, I would have been pleased if the plan had included skyscrapers.) Preserving history does not, by itself, boost the economy; you still need tourists and new investment.

Voila! Along came a remarkable book published in 1994, John Berendt’s *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*. *Midnight* – first the book, then the 1997 Clint Eastwood movie – revealed the sheer quirkiness and charm of the city, while also telling the story of antiques dealer Jim Williams, who murdered his young male employee and lover, and went on trial for the crime *four* times. The book became a huge best seller and resulted in a sharp uptick in tourism.

Another boost for tourism was large-scale development, in the 1980s and 1990s of Hilton Head Island, SC, which is but an hour away, and uses Savannah’s airport as its main transportation hub (now called the Savannah-Hilton Head Airport).

Two more developments helped the city grow. Savannah College of Art and Design, founded in 1978, bought up dozens of properties in the downtown area for its growing student population, now approximately 13,000. And, more recently, expansion of Savannah’s port, today the second busiest on the east coast and fourth busiest in the nation.

Tourism, SCAD, Hilton Head, the port – all factors for growth. Savannah’s tourism outranks most cities of its size, at seven million overnight visitors per year, and another seven-million day trippers. If you’re driving up or down Interstate 95 in the vicinity of Savannah, it’s easy to spend a few hours touring the historic area.



Despite these growth factors, today the population of greater Charleston is twice as large, and Jacksonville four times greater, than Savannah's. Also, the last census shows Savannah, once the state's number two city behind Atlanta, is now Georgia's fourth biggest in population, trailing Augusta and Columbus. It does raise questions as to why the city, given its location and all the features mentioned above, hasn't grown like the others.



Savannah vs. Charleston

Ruth and I married in July 1970, while living in New York. The next six years would find us in Texas (my two-year stint in the Air Force) and then back in New York for further medical training. During this period, we went to Savannah several times to visit my parents. Ruth was raised in Connecticut and during those visits she was always impressed by the slow Southern lifestyle, the lack of hustle, bustle...and business activity. In the 1970s, Broughton St., the downtown's main street, was dead, with many stores shuttered. It was a depressing sight.

After Mom and Dad retired to Florida in 1976, we did not return to Savannah again until 1987, and then only for an afternoon, while on a family vacation to nearby Hilton Head Island.

After that, we didn't go back until 2008. Then I reconnected with my high school friend Danny Kaminsky, who remained in Savannah, where he built the city's premier antiques store, Savannah Galleries, on Bryan St. (See Chapter 50th High School Reunion.)


In 2008 I found Savannah a different city than I grew up in; indeed, different from the city I brought Ruth to in the early 1970s, before my parents moved to Florida. In 2008 it was full of tourists and all the stores on Broughton St. were occupied. Heavily advertised were “*Midnight*” and “*Ghost House*” tours. We walked the squares, toured the Williams house featured in Berendt's book, and generally enjoyed the ambience of the city's historic district.

After a few days in Savannah, Ruth and I drove up to visit Charleston, my first time in that city. (It's only two hours from Savannah, but I had no reason to go there as a kid; just another backward southern town.) Charleston has always “outranked” Savannah as a tourist mecca. It is older (founded 1670 vs. 1733 for Savannah), has a bigger foodie culture, and has Fort Sumter, where the Civil War began. But after our visit in 2008, my impression was that Savannah is prettier, and a nicer place to visit for a first-time tourist who might have to choose between the two cities.

By this time, 2008, I was deep into creating websites using self-taught HTML coding, and decided to create a website comparing the two cities for first-time tourists: **Charleston or Savannah?** I posted the website June 2, 2010. After the introduction (part of which is shown below), I give a comparison of the two cities in several categories. Below the screenshot are two of these categories, with my opinions – unchanged, I might add, over the past decade.

<http://www.lakesidepress.com/Charleston-Savannah/>


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Charleston or Savannah?

Which city to visit if you only have time for one?

by [Lawrence Martin](#)



This age-old question has been debated for generations. Both cities are historic Old South, each known for exuding charm and history. Today they attract cold-weary travelers like Las Vegas attracts gamblers. But there's only one Vegas, and it's unique as a gambling mecca. In contrast, Savannah and Charleston offer similar location, history, ambience, culture and amenities (NOT the same, just similar). Only 110 miles apart, they share the same geography and weather of the southeast's [Low Country](#).

The premise here is that you've been to neither city and want to see this part of the old South, but can't decided which city to visit. There are many guide books to the two cities, plus numerous web sites (a few discuss [both cities](#)), but they don't (easily) reveal which city YOU will find most enjoyable. Here I will give you the nitty gritty in one web site: 15 categories of comparison, plus lots of links so you can research each topic in more depth. If you are really undecided, a few minutes on this page can help you choose.

I was born and grew up in one of these cities, and have explored the other. Living in Ohio for many years has provided a unique perspective of what makes the two cities so attractive, especially to northerners. It was not always so. I knew Savannah and Charleston before there was any significant tourist industry, when [River Street \(Savannah\)](#) and [Market Street \(Charleston\)](#) were just streets, not magnets for hoards of tourists. I've seen them transform from southern backwater towns into must-see-before-you-die places to visit.

In truth, you should visit BOTH Savannah and Charleston if you have the time (at least a week for both, including one or two stops between them). But if you've been to neither city and only have time for one -- yet are unsure which you would enjoy most -- review my web site. And check out one excellent book

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Charm & 'walking ambience'

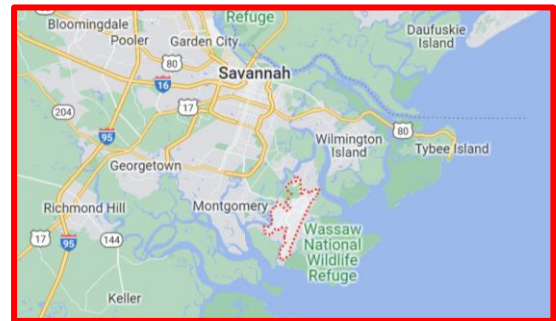
Charleston wins on history, but Savannah triumphs with its charm and 'walking ambience'. In this category, Savannah ranks number one in the country. If you are visiting for the first time from a big, sky-scrapered U.S. city, you will be blown away by what you find here.

Retirement

Either City. When everything is considered - climate, taxes, geography, golf, culture - there's not a clear winner in this category. There are so many retirement communities in and around the two cities that it's buyer's choice. Note: Almost everything you read about specific retirement developments will be real estate hype. Ideally, you should make an extended visit or rent in the immediate area before making a big move

50th High School Reunion

We returned to Savannah in 2011 for my 50th high school reunion. We stayed in a rental home in The Landings, an upscale development on Skidaway Island, about a twenty-minute ride from downtown. The development (red-dotted outline on map) dates from the 1970s, and now has an island population of about 8000, with golf courses, walking paths, and boat docks.



The 50th was my first high school reunion. I went because my old high school friend Danny Kaminsky, mentioned in the previous chapter, was going. Ruth and I had last visited Danny and his girlfriend Carol back in 2008, and looked forward to getting together with them again (picture from 2011 reunion).



We had a great time the four days we were in Savannah. However, when I thought of trying to apply a single word to the reunion itself, my initial choices – “fun,” “interesting,” “reconnecting,” “reminiscing” – all seemed rather banal, though true. The word that really sticks in my mind, as I remember the experience, is “sobering.” Out of our class of about 350, approximately ten percent were dead. At our evening banquet the organizers showed a rolling list of those gone. Some I hardly knew, but others I remembered well. Weren’t they too young to die? Anyone who has attended a 50th reunion will have this experience. People don’t live forever, and by age 67 or 68 a certain number will have passed.

For Ruth, another aspect of the reunion was somewhat jarring. The entire class was white. Savannah’s schools didn’t integrate until the mid-1960s. One-third of Ruth’s 1963 senior class in Stratford, Connecticut was Black.

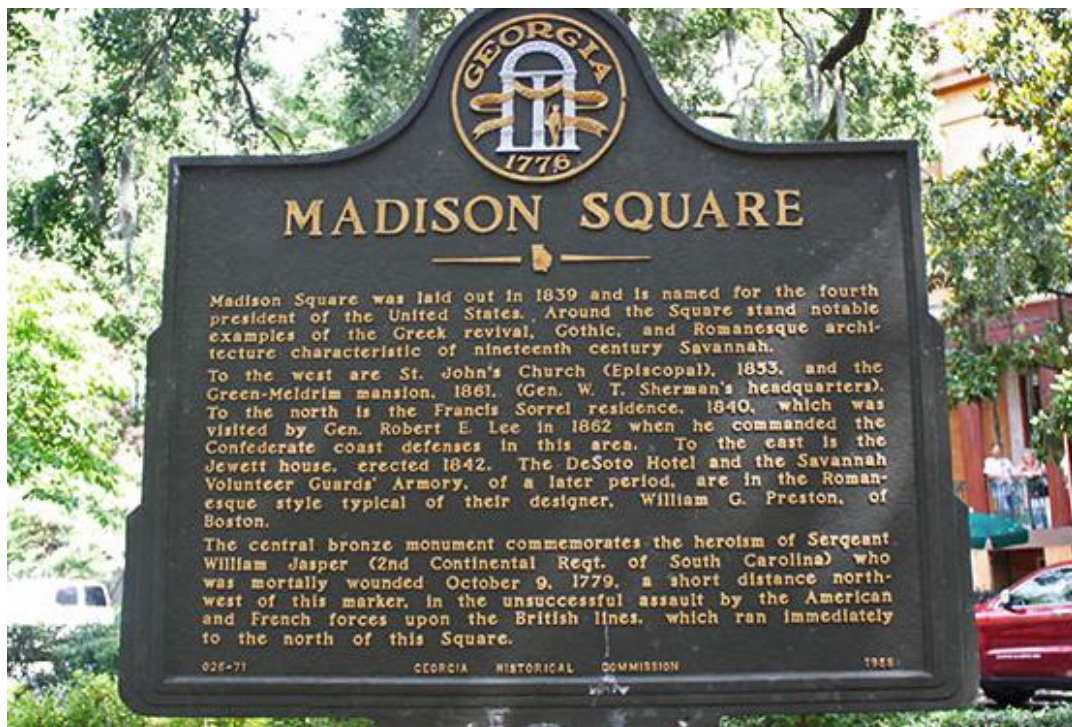
But enough negatives. The reunion *was* fun, to reconnect with classmates and see how they had changed. Most of them, I learned, were actually retired; I would be working a few more years. So would Danny. In 2011 he was co-owner of Savannah’s premier antique store, Savannah Galleries, shown in the photo. His partner passed away in 2020 and now he’s the sole proprietor. He may be retired by the time you read this, but if not, his store is at 30 E. Bryan St., downtown. Go visit. It’s a veritable museum.



<http://www.savannahgalleries.com/home.html>

In the afternoons Ruth and I took a guided walking tour of the historic district. We strolled by the 1853 Green-Meldrim House, famous as General Sherman's headquarters after he captured Savannah in December 1864. The house is now owned by St. John's Episcopal Church, which is next door. Tours of the house were limited, and we made a reservation for the next one available. Before our tour of this house, I had not the slightest idea it would inspire me to write a Civil War novel.

Top: Madison Square. Bottom: Historic Plaque on the Square



My First Novel, *Sherman's Mistress in Savannah*

Regarding my books, which cover a variety of topics, people sometimes ask, “where do you get your ideas?” Most people who read probably have ideas about a book they could write. If you google “How many want to write a book?” you’ll find mention of surveys ranging from about eighty to ninety percent. The book people contemplate could be a memoir, a novel, or a nonfiction work about their particular interest. Ideas are cheap and easy to come by. The difficulty is getting motivated to put your idea into words, on paper or digitally, and process them into a readable book.

Twenty-five books later I don’t have a good answer for where I get my ideas. There is no “idea factory”; they just pop into my head. Like the one for my first novel, *Sherman's Mistress in Savannah*.

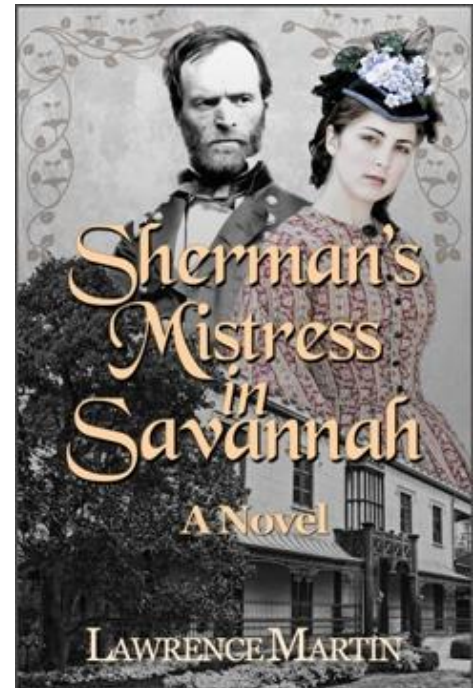
First, some background. In the 1950s Savannah was not the tourist city it is today. Its historic section, situated around twenty-one squares and encompassing the downtown area, was undeveloped for tourists and I think underappreciated by most Savannahians. Movie theaters were downtown and we went there often, but I never thought much about the city’s history. Also, none of the Civil War sites popular with tourists today were open back then, except Fort Pulaski, a large brick fort near Tybee Island, fifteen miles from downtown. Pulaski was taken by Union forces in April 1862, but until General Sherman’s army arrived in December 1864, there was no Union attempt to invade Savannah itself.

Growing up I had no special interest in the Civil War. I don’t even recall the War being taught much in high school. Of course, people always joke that in the South it was called “The War of Northern Aggression,” and I suspect the root cause of the war (slavery) was glossed over in school. I graduated in 1961, and Georgia’s schools had not yet been integrated.

Fast forward to 2011, and the opportunity to tour the Green-Meldrim house, when we came to Savannah for my 50th high school reunion.

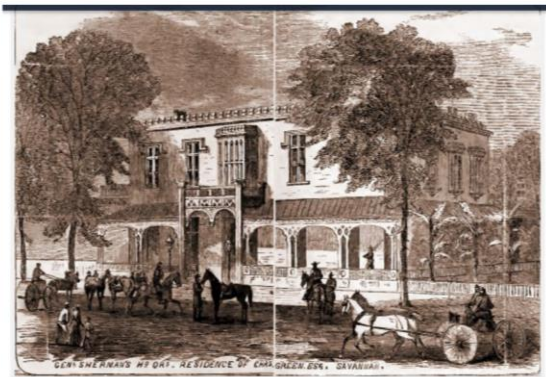
Built in 1853 in a “Gothic-Revival-style” for British cotton merchant Charles Green, it was the largest house in Savannah before the Civil War. The house became General Sherman’s Union Army headquarters in December 1864, after his “March to the Sea” from Atlanta.

By the time the Union army arrived to Savannah in late December, the heavily outnumbered Confederate troops guarding the city had just escaped over the Savannah River to South Carolina. The Confederates, led by General Hardee, would have suffered considerable losses in a battle, hence the decision to evacuate. As a result, Sherman’s army entered unopposed and the city was not burned like Atlanta (or, later, Columbia, SC).



On December 22, 1864, Charles Green, a wealthy cotton merchant from England, ran to meet General Sherman downtown, to offer his house as Union headquarters, *gratis*. Green's family was up north at the time, and Green said he himself would stay in just one or two rooms and keep out of the way. The historical assumption is that the Englishman hoped Sherman would spare his stores of cotton with such a generous offer, his house being the largest and most elegant in the city. Sherman made no promises about the cotton, but accepted the offer. (He would later confiscate *all* the cotton, including Green's.). Thus, Green's mansion became Sherman's headquarters during the occupation, which lasted until the end of January 1865, when the army continued its march northward.

Left: Drawing of the Charles Green mansion from 1865 (<https://ironbrigader.com/>).
Right: Front of the house in 2011.



Green got his house back, and it stayed in the family for another twenty-seven years. In 1892 the house was purchased from the Green family by Judge Peter W. Meldrim. In 1943 the Meldrim family sold the house to St. John's Episcopal Church, whose parish is next door. It has since been known as the Green-Meldrim house.

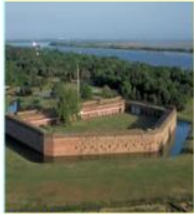
The house was not open to the public when I was growing up. In fact, in 2011, when we came to Savannah for my 50th high school reunion, I knew almost nothing about Sherman's 1864 visit. Ruth and I took the house tour and I was blown away by the history. Here was this historically-important home, just a few miles from where I grew up, and I am only now learning about it? At that moment I became obsessed with learning about Savannah during the Civil War. (Here I go again, a familiar pattern. Obsession over a subject leads to writing a book. Pulmonary physiology. Blood gases. Scuba. Golf. Now, Civil War. And there will be yet another new obsession, in retirement: Music Theory.)

Initially, I wasn't thinking of writing fiction – just nonfiction, about Savannah's role in the War. I began to read extensively on this subject, and created websites as a way to facilitate my learning. If you can explain something clearly, whether through a talk, a book, or a website, then you likely have a decent handle on the subject. My websites are still in place, though dated in their design.

Savannah in the Civil War

Lakeside Press Web Sites

[Return to Lakeside Press](#)



Civil War Savannah: 1861-1862

A detailed time line of events in and near Savannah, Georgia during the Civil War; covers 1861-1862.



Civil War Savannah: 1863-1865

Continues the time line through the end of the war, April 1865.

This research went on for several months. I felt like a professional historian as I delved into primary documents, such as Civil War diaries, minutes of meetings held at the Green mansion, magazines of the era (mainly Harper's Weekly), and the original 1864 telegram General Sherman sent to President Lincoln offering him the city of Savannah as a Christmas present. That handwritten document, shown in the chapter "Research" (Part II), became the centerpiece of another website. <http://www.lakesidepress.com/Savannah-CivilWar/sherman-telegram.html>.) I even started writing a screenplay about Sherman in Savannah, a work aimed at high school students.

One important aspect of this research was discovering the role of Blacks in influencing Sherman's Special Field Order No. 15 of January 16, 1865. In mid-January 1865 a group of twenty African-American clergymen met with General Sherman and Secretary of War Edwin Stanton on the second floor of Green's mansion. The resulting Order No. 15 authorized giving forty acres of confiscated Confederate land per family to newly freed slaves. (It is commonly referred to as "40 Acres and a Mule," though "mule" was not part of the original Order. In any case, President Andrew Johnson later nullified the distribution plan.)

Several months after our October 2011 Savannah visit, and a ton of research, I had an epiphany. In my journal on April 5, 2012, I wrote:

I worked on my Civil War 1863-1865 web site last night, adding events of April 1865. Then watched some idiot box [television] and went to sleep around 9:30. Awoke this morning at 4:45, read some of *Saving Savannah* and got another, better idea. Rather than write the play "Sherman in Savannah," which has a million to one long shot of ever being produced, what I should really write is a steamy *novel* about this period. Enough of these academic non-fiction efforts. I'll retire soon (perhaps within two years) and it would be nice to have a project to work on, something I feel passionate about and that conceivably could be a

popular work. I've 'wasted' two decades writing niche books. They are good but go nowhere, a few hundred or thousand copies. I should write what interests me AND what people want to read about. The list is short: vampires, food, love...SEX. So, given my recent interest in Sherman, Savannah and the Civil War, I should write the novel about an idea that's been germinating in my mind for some time; but only *this* morning did I really see the full novel in my head:

That's it – the origin of my first novel. The idea just popped into my head. Here is part of what I wrote at the time.

Sherman's Mistress in Savannah

A Novel

The "A Novel" on the book cover is necessary because too many people would assume it's non-fiction and trash the book when they find out the whole thing is made up; in this type of situation you have to make it clear that it's a work of historical *fiction*. For a brief time I went back and forth between whether it should be a novel in the first person by the mistress or in the 3rd person by a nameless narrator. I quickly decided on the latter, since that will give me more latitude to write some historical background leading up to December 1864, and also about Savannah events during Sherman's occupation that the mistress would not necessarily know about.

The key themes of the book will be Sherman's mistress, which is entirely fictional. It will be a device to highlight Sherman's non-troubled soul about all the destruction he has caused, the conflict between the mistress' loyalty to the Confederacy (she has lost a husband and father to the war; a brother is still fighting in Virginia) plus historical facts about Sherman's occupation. Ancillary characters may include: Mayor Arnold, General Hazen; Sherman's adjutant, who will convey the woman to his quarters most nights of the occupation; Fanny Yates Cohen, who will be a friend of the mistress; two black servants of the mistress, recently freed by her dead father's will; the mistress' 4 year old son; and the mistress' aunt, with whom she lives and is slightly senile...

I went on and on for several more paragraphs, laying out the entire plot. Which is ironic, since for all future fiction I have worked as a "pantser," someone who writes by the seat of his pants, and not a "plotter." Somehow, though, on that one spring day I had the whole plot in my head and wanted to get it saved in the computer. I ended that 2012 journal entry with:

So it goes on like this. It will be historically accurate for the most part, interspersed with a few steamy sex scenes. The pull will be the history, how Sherman dealt with Stanton, the Negro problem, et al. and how Belle handles the love-hate relationship between Confederates and Union forces.

On April 9, 2012, I wrote:

Since writing journal entries on Thursday about *Sherman's Mistress in Savannah*, I continued to develop the story in my head. Yesterday I spent a couple of hours writing down snippets and researching dates to make it historically

accurate. The first chapter will all be historical background, November 16-Dec 20, 1864: no dialogue. I plan scenes with Mayor Arnold, and maybe one in the black ghetto. I have to get the history and dates right, including when Sherman was in Savannah as a young man and met Belle's (the mistress's name, for now) mother. The only significant fiction will be involving Belle and her back story, and of course the dialogue. But geography, weather, well-known people – all have to be accurate. There's a lot of research to be done. I give myself 6 months to have a reasonable draft of the book. The broad outline is all in my head. Once done I will self-publish with Amazon, and see what happens. I am also toying with a pseudonym for the author, e.g., Augustus J. Joramy, Joramy Martin, Eli Joramy, something like that. Not sure I want to use my real name.

I wrote *Sherman's Mistress* like there was no tomorrow, anxious to convert my plot into a completed book. I was two years away from retirement, very busy in the hospital, and my writing was confined to evenings and weekends. I wrote the story out of my head, ignorant of "rules of writing," and many aspects of the craft I would not learn about until much later. I was not in any critique group, so apart from my wife, I had no feedback on the chapters. (Given the sexual theme, I could not ask our daughters to read any draft. I mean, I could have asked, but the feedback would likely have been tainted by the sex scenes, if they read those parts at all. I just didn't want to take a chance of making them feel uncomfortable, and by their response make me feel uncomfortable.)

I hired an illustrator for the cover (a real photo of Sherman, and a stock photo of a 19th-century woman). The book completed, I sent query letters to maybe half a dozen agents. A few replied, with the usual "thank you, not for us," so I self-published it on Amazon's Create Space, January 2013. And I decided against using a pseudonym. <https://www.amazon.com/Shermans-Mistress-Savannah-Lawrence-Martin/dp/1479307327>

Here is the Amazon.com blurb.

After their infamous 'March to the Sea', General William Tecumseh Sherman and his 62,000-man army occupied Savannah during December 1864 - January 1865. Sherman took as his army headquarters the mansion of Englishman Charles Green on Madison Square. Against this historical backdrop the novel introduces a young war widow, Belle Anderson, who becomes the general's willing mistress. She discovers true sexual freedom and something else -- a bordello operator who stalks her at night and threatens to expose the affair. "Sherman's Mistress" interweaves the fictional story with many historical characters of the period, including Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, Savannah Mayor Richard Arnold, diarist Fanny Yates Cohen, blockade runner Gazaway Lamar, Major Henry Hitchcock, and Union Generals John Geary and Jefferson C. Davis.

I then sought Amazon reviews and plastered Civil War Face-book groups with information about the book. The few reviews weren't all positive and sales were meager, but no matter. I was smitten: both by Civil War history, especially involving Savannah, and the prospect of writing more fiction.

Any lesson here for new writers? Two.

- **If you know a subject in depth, you can use your knowledge to infuse a work of fiction. See my profiles of Robin Cook and Harry Turtledove, two masters of knowledge-based fiction writing.**
- **Unless you are writing fantasy or science fiction, the backdrop for your novel – the setting, clothes worn, household items, modes of transportation, dates of historic events – should be accurate. Get your facts right so readers won't be distracted and can concentrate on the story.**

Postscript

I did finish the play about General Sherman, and posted it on the internet at <http://www.lakesidepress.com/ShermanPlay.html>.

Then I wrote two more Civil War novels, which are discussed in later chapters. I call the three novels my “Civil War Trilogy.” Each book is outlined at <http://www.lakesidepress.com/CivilWarNovels.html>.

Frederick Douglass (1817 or 1818 - 1895)

My research for *Sherman's Mistress in Savannah* and two other Civil War novels cast a wide net. I had watched the Ken Burns PBS series on the Civil War when it first aired in 1990, and knew some basic information about the major battles, but was ignorant of the detail needed to write historical fiction.

I had a lot to learn, and for my novels attacked the subject with relish. I homed in on primary sources – material written either during the War (1861-1865), or by people who lived in the period. An amazing trove of primary source material is on the internet, such as newspapers and maps from the war years, minutes of government meetings, and field orders by commanders from both sides. Available for purchase on Amazon are numerous books written by participants and eyewitnesses, e.g., *Memoirs of General William T. Sherman*, *Mary Chestnut's Civil War*, and Civil War diaries by ordinary soldiers. My research also led me to visit the Library of Congress, the Savannah Historical Society, and a dozen Civil War battlefields. With my wife a willing traveler, we toured sites from Vicksburg to Gettysburg.

(We even went to a reenactment of a Civil War battle at Hale Farm and Village, outside of Cleveland. There were no actual Civil War battles in Ohio, and I don't remember which one was being re-enacted. I do remember that it was a hot summer day, and hundreds of "soldiers" were in uniform. Just as the "fighting" began, and my mind settled into the long-ago period, a soldier on the battlefield fainted. Out of nowhere came an ambulance, siren beeping, driving into the battle. The man was rescued; he would not have been so lucky in 1863. Anyway, within a few minutes the battle resumed.)

My reading brought me to autobiographies by Frederick Douglass. He wrote three, published in 1845, 1855, and 1881. They are a history lesson in the nation's struggle against slavery and nascent adoption of civil rights for all citizens. Just consider the period from 1857 to 1870:

- March 1857: Supreme Court's Dred Scott decision, denying all rights to slaves who escaped to free states
- April 1861-April 1865: Civil War
- January 1863: Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, proclaiming freedom to all slaves held by states at war with the U.S.
- January 1865: ratification of 13th amendment, formally abolishing slavery
- July 1868: ratification of 14th amendment, extending liberties and rights granted by the Bill of Rights to formerly enslaved people
- February 1870: ratification of the 15th amendment: the right to vote "shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." (Women did not get the right to vote until the 19th amendment was ratified in 1920.)

Prior to delving into Douglass's autobiographies, and also modern sources, I knew only the bare outline of his life: that he had been born a slave, was somehow liberated, and had become an orator and spokesman for the abolitionist movement. (Douglas himself was not sure of his birth date, only that it was one of the two years stated in the chapter title.) I also knew that he had met with President Lincoln during the Civil War. But I never pondered the question: how did someone born into slavery learn to write so well and speak so eloquently?

Of the authors profiled in this book, Douglass was by far the least formally educated. Eleven of the authors were college graduates, eight with M.D. degrees, and one with a Ph.D. in biochemistry. (Agatha Christie was home-schooled by her parents and sister.)

In essence, Douglass had no formal education. Slaves were not taught to read, lest they become rebellious. It was Douglass's good fortune, if the term can be applied to any slave, to come under the ownership of the Auld family, in Maryland. He served one branch of the family in Baltimore, working for Hugh and Sophia Auld. When he was about twelve, Hugh Auld's wife Sophia began teaching him the alphabet. Initially, as he points out in his autobiographies, he found her a kind and tender-hearted woman, who treated him with respect.

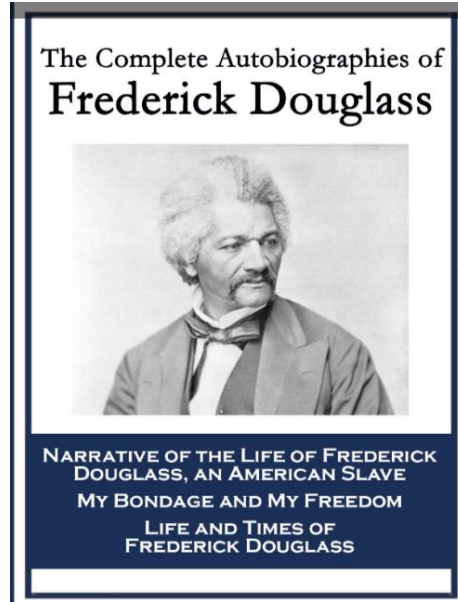
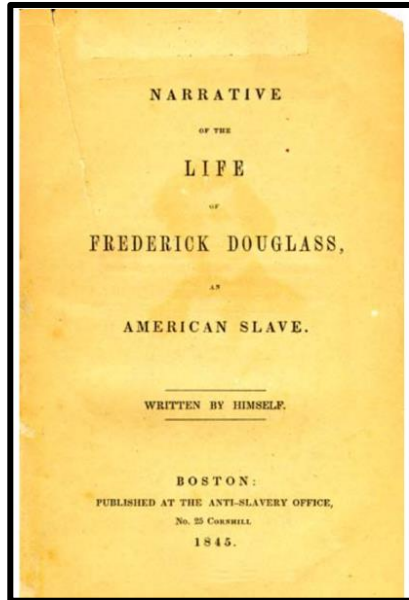
Hugh Auld disapproved of the tutoring, feeling that literacy would encourage slaves to desire freedom, and convinced his wife to stop the teaching. Fortunately, Douglass (whose last name at the time was actually Bailey) had other learning opportunities, including help from white children in the neighborhood. And he read voraciously: newspapers, pamphlets, political materials, and any books he could get hold of. In 1833, working for a different master, he and other black slaves were also able to attend a Sunday school where they could read from religious scripture.

There are many details about Douglass's early "education," and below I quote some of what he wrote about this period. But it all focuses on one salient fact: after some initial instruction, his reading was largely self-taught. Learning to read opened his eyes to the full nature of slavery and fostered his goal of seeking freedom. On September 3, 1838, Douglass successfully escaped Maryland by boarding a northbound train of the Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Baltimore Railroad.

The most widely read of Douglass's three autobiographies is the first, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845), which became a bestseller and was influential in promoting the cause of abolition. Five thousand copies were sold within four months of its first printing, and six new editions were published between 1845 and 1849. The cover of the first edition is shown below.

His other two autobiographies were *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855) and *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881, revised in 1892). All three are available in a single volume on Amazon (e-book and print), *The Complete Autobiographies of Frederick Douglass*.

<https://www.amazon.com/Complete-Autobiographies-Frederick-Douglass-Narrative-ebook/dp/B00TN3YOWA/>



By 1845 Douglass had come under the tutelage of famed abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, who wrote a Preface to *Narrative of the Life*, waxing eloquently about how Douglass overcame his bondage. Below is a small part of Garrison's lengthy Preface.

<https://www.holloway.com/g/narrative-of-the-life-of-frederick-douglass/sections/preface-by-william-lloyd-garrison>

PREFACE

IN the month of August, 1841, I attended an anti-slavery convention in Nantucket, at which it was my happiness to become acquainted with FREDERICK DOUGLASS, the writer of the following Narrative. He was a stranger to nearly every member of that body; but, having recently made his escape from the southern prison-house of bondage, and feeling his curiosity excited to ascertain the principles and measures of the abolitionists,—of whom he had heard a somewhat vague description while he was a slave,—he was induced to give his attendance, on the occasion alluded to, though at that time a resident in New Bedford.

...I shall never forget his first speech at the convention—the extraordinary emotion it excited in my own mind—the powerful impression it created upon a crowded auditory, completely taken by surprise—the applause which followed from the beginning to the end of his felicitous remarks...

Garrison ends his Preface with:

Reader! are you with the man-stealers in sympathy and purpose, or on the side of their down-trodden victims? If with the former, then are you the foe of God and man. If with the latter, what are you prepared to do and dare in their behalf? Be faithful, be vigilant, be untiring in your efforts to break every yoke, and let the oppressed go free. Come what may--cost what it may--inscribe on the banner which you unfurl to the breeze, as your

religious and political motto-- NO COMPROMISE WITH SLAVERY!
NO UNION WITH SLAVEHOLDERS!

WM. LLOYD GARRISON.

BOSTON, *May* 1, 1845

Regarding learning to read, Douglass wrote in *Narrative of the Life*:

Very soon after I went to live with Mr. and Mrs. Auld, she very kindly commenced to teach me the A, B, C. After I had learned this, she assisted me in learning to spell words of three or four letters. Just at this point of my progress, Mr. Auld found out what was going on, and at once forbade Mrs. Auld to instruct me further, telling her, among other things, that it was unlawful, as well as unsafe, to teach a slave to read...[Douglass next quotes Auld using the N word in a totally disparaging manner.]

These words sank deep into my heart, stirred up sentiments within that lay slumbering, and called into existence an entirely new train of thought. It was a new and special revelation, explaining dark and mysterious things, with which my youthful understanding had struggled, but struggled in vain. I now understood what had been to me a most perplexing difficulty--to wit, the white man's power to enslave the black man. It was a grand achievement, and I prized it highly.

From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom. It was just what I wanted, and I got it at a time when I the least expected it. Whilst I was saddened by the thought of losing the aid of my kind mistress, I was gladdened by the invaluable instruction which, by the merest accident, I had gained from my master. Though conscious of the difficulty of learning without a teacher, I set out with high hope, and a fixed purpose, at whatever cost of trouble, to learn how to read.

Douglass's second autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, came out in 1855. He explains that after Mrs. Auld ceased her teaching, at the insistence of Mr. Auld, he sought instruction from neighborhood white boys. In this passage Douglass comments on a book he bought, which greatly expanded his understanding of slavery.

When I was about thirteen years old, and had succeeded in learning to read, every increase of knowledge, especially anything respecting the free states, was an additional weight to the almost intolerable burden of my thought—"I am a slave for life." To my bondage I could see no end. It was a terrible reality, and I shall never be able to tell how sadly that thought chafed my young spirit. Fortunately, or unfortunately, I had earned a little money in blacking boots for some gentlemen, with which I purchased of Mr. Knight, on Thames street, what was then a very popular school book, viz., "The Columbian Orator," for which I paid fifty cents. I was led to buy this book by hearing some little boys say they were going to learn some pieces out of it for the exhibition. This volume was indeed a rich treasure, and every opportunity afforded me, for a time, was spent in diligently perusing it. Among much other interesting matter, that which I read again

and again with unflagging satisfaction was a short dialogue between a master and his slave.

Douglass, Frederick. *The Complete Autobiographies of Frederick Douglass* (Kindle Locations 7740-7747).

His third autobiography, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881), takes us through the Civil War, when he had three meetings with President Lincoln, then his post-war efforts fighting for the civil rights of ex-slaves. The revised version (published 1892) includes his European tour of 1886-1887.

Douglass wrote clearly, with great expression, and from the writing one would never guess the limits of his formal education. So, does one need a formal education to become an effective, eloquent writer? By his example, evidently not. Another well-documented example is Abraham Lincoln, author of brilliant inauguration speeches and the Gettysburg address. Lincoln had very little formal schooling, but his biographers point out how he read constantly and had a deep interest in learning.

So, if formal schooling is not a necessity, what is the key to becoming a writer? There are, at minimum, four essentials. One is native intelligence. Douglass had that. Two is learning to read. Douglass achieved that, through haphazard and erratic exposure to instruction.

Three and four are what Stephen King emphasizes in his memoir.

If you want to be a writer, you must do two things above all others: read a lot and write a lot. There's no way around these two things that I'm aware of, no shortcut. (p. 145, *On Writing*)

As soon as he was able, Douglass read a lot: newspapers, the Bible, posters, any book he could find. And then he decided to write: autobiographies, speeches, and newspaper articles.

In closing on this profile, it is interesting to consider another of Stephen King's comments, this one in his Foreword to *On Writing*.

This is a short book because most books about writing are filled with bullshit.

A little extreme, perhaps, but it does emphasize that learning to write is not to be found in books about writing. You can also say the same about the endless internet offerings for writing seminars and lectures. Unless you can get feedback on your work, on a more or less continuous basis (such as in a good critique group), I doubt any book, seminar, lecture \, or recorded course is going to teach you to be a writer.

Want to be a writer? Go read other stuff. Lots of other stuff. And start writing. Pour out your words. Let Frederick Douglass be an inspiration.

Out of Time

After finishing *Sherman's Mistress in Savannah*, I began thinking of writing another Civil War novel. In addition to my primary-source research on General Sherman and 1860s Savannah, I read widely about the war in general, both nonfiction and novels. Good advice you'll hear often is to read the genre you plan to write in.

This reading brought me to alternative history novels, of which there are many. Change this or that part of history and then tell a story about the different outcome. Napoleon wins the battle at Waterloo. Lee wins the battle of Gettysburg. Hitler prevails in the Battle of Britain. There are many novels with alternative outcome scenarios.

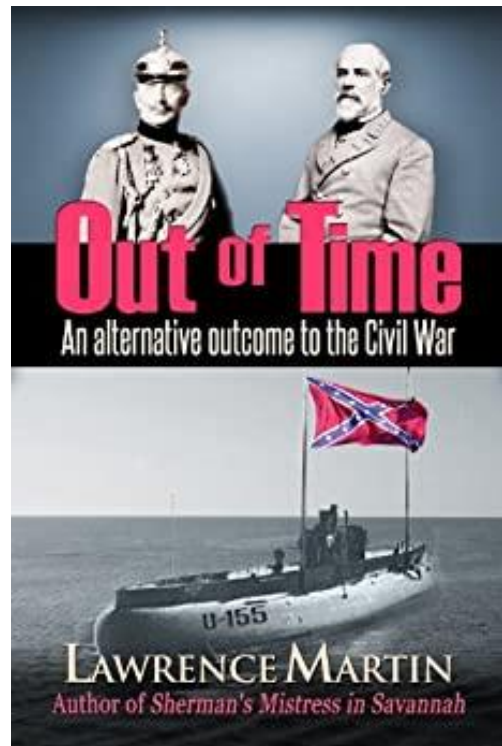
A subgenre of alternative history is time travel. Send people, machines, or weapons back in time to alter history. One of the more popular books of this genre is Harry Turtledove's *The Guns of the South*, published in 1992. It deals with a group of time-traveling white supremacists from late twentieth-century South Africa. They bring AK-47s to Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. The result: a Confederate victory in the war.

The story intrigued me and (drum roll!) I thought I could do a more interesting tale built around the time travel theme. I would introduce a more historically-significant motive for trying to alter the Civil War outcome and involve a much more sophisticated set of weaponry. Here is my journal entry with the very first mention of the novel.

Wednesday, March 13, 2013

For 2 nights before [a vacation] trip I lay in bed thinking of another book, and decided on an alternate history of the Civil War. I figured it out the night before the trip, and began writing it on the plane on the iPad. The title and the story are now all in my head. It will be called *Out of Time*, about 1916 German soldiers who (via time warp) come to Savannah in late Nov 1864. They bring nerve gas and teach the confederates how to use it, so they can defeat Sherman's army. They come via a cargo ship and two submarines. Then they go to Virginia, etc. It's got me excited and...it's all in my head, just need time to write it down. The title is *OUT OF TIME: An Alternate History of How The Civil War Ended*.

I started writing and in the ensuing months did a great deal of research on German submarines and guns, to go with my previous research on Civil War weaponry. By March 2014 I had a completed draft, the result of multiple revisions and critiques in my writing club. The title changed slightly to *Out of Time: An alternative outcome to the Civil War*. I commissioned a



great cover, showing the two principals in the novel, Kaiser Wilhelm II and Robert E. Lee, plus a WWI German submarine flying the Confederate flag!

After a brief intro about the Union army's march toward Savannah in December 1864, the novel pivots to Kaiser Wilhelm's Imperial Office in Berlin, July 1, 1918. Germany is losing the Great War. Why? Because the U.S. has joined the allies. Wilhelm is convinced Germany would prevail without the might of the U.S. against him. What if the U.S. was a smaller, weaker country in 1917, the year it entered the war?

The U.S. would be if...the Confederates had won the Civil War. Or, more realistically, given the North's far greater population and industrial capacity, arrived at a truce. Then there would be *two separate countries* in the area now occupied by just one powerful United States. And, in the twentieth century, the Confederate States would likely be neutral or perhaps even friendly to Germany. More importantly, in Kaiser Wilhelm's mind, the Yankee States would not be strong enough to intervene in his war and make a difference.

In the novel Wilhelm's thinking is more than just a mind game because *Germany has a time machine*, big enough to send *submarines* back in time. This part of the plot is called a conceit, something preposterous that the reader will accept if everything else is accurate. So, you can have a time machine, but when the time travelers arrive back to the Civil War era, the nineteenth-century soldiers better be wearing the correct uniforms, speaking the language of the period, and everything else should be historically accurate except for items related to the conceit.

My younger brother Bernie expressed some interest in reading the draft, and I sent him the first few chapters. He responded enthusiastically, with the following email.

Feb 23, 2014

Just finished reading it. Liked it very much and want to read more, so send another 20-30 pages if you have them. One item, check...At first you said 2 subs were ready for battle with torpedoes and the others were cargo ships, then you said 4 were battle ready. Not sure I read it correctly, but it did confuse me. Other than that, enjoyed it. Hannah [his wife] came in when I was on the sex page and immediately asked what is wrong with us!!!

I found the mistake, made the changes, and replied:

Good pick up! I missed that. Actually, I miss a lot, and every time I go back and re-read, I find more trivial (but damaging) mistakes. So nothing is too unimportant to mention. As to sex, there is only the letter and book excerpt in Chapter 1, to whet the appetite of people who might otherwise stop after the first chapter. The real sex doesn't appear until Chapter 10. I do include sex in both books [the other being *Sherman's Mistress*] in the perhaps naive belief that it makes them more interesting to non-historians...

This was before I knew anything about critique clubs or beta readers or the basic rules of writing. Like many self-published authors, I relied on self-editing and reading by relatives (brother, wife). Still, I felt the book was edited well enough to send queries to a couple of agents.

Out of curiosity, knowing full well the rejection mantra, I started with the agent who represented Harry Turtledove, Mr. Russell Galen of the Scovil Galen Ghosh agency.

There was no chance he could accept this work if he thought it competed with Turtledove, and of course he didn't. My second query went to an agency that had responded personally in 2012 to *Sherman's Mistress in Savannah*, Folio Literary Management. Again, no interest. I sent no more queries and decided to continue on the path of self-publication. For writers actively pursuing literary agents, my meager effort will likely be viewed as giving up too easily.

If you are determined to find an agent and traditional publisher, you have to be hyper-diligent. One published author, blogging on Writers Digest website, states you need to query 80 agents or more.

**Don't Give Up Until You've Queried
80 Agents or More**

Novelist and award-winning former journalist Kristi Belcamino explains why aspiring authors shouldn't be discouraged by query rejections.

<https://www.writersdigest.com/whats-new/dont-give-up-until-youve-queried-80-agents-or-more>

Given my perceived likelihood of not securing an agent no matter how many query letters I sent out, and my age, I wasn't willing to waste precious time on this effort. The novel is a good story, and with a traditional publisher – which would at least give access to magazine reviews and bookstore distribution – could be a popular book.

In May 2014 I published *Out of Time* on Amazon Kindle, initially as an e-book. I received several 5-star reviews, and after making a few needed changes, in June 2015 published the print edition on the Smashwords platform.

To date, *Out of Time* has over three dozen reviews, averaging 4.1 out of 5 stars. I made the ending enigmatic, leaving open the possibility of a sequel, but never wrote it. Below is one of the 5-star reviews, mentioning a possible sequel.

If Imperial Germany had a time machine in 1918, couldn't they have found a better way to deploy it? I'm not sure. If one assumes some of the "rules" and contradictions set forth in a long tradition of time travel stories there would be some things the Germans could not or would not want to do...I hope Mr. Martin writes a sequel, maybe several. He could explore the fact that the Germans were not so clearly the villains in World War One as many people believe.

There is also a 1-star review by an angry reader who accused me of knocking off Harry Turtledove's *The Guns of the South*. Apparently, in this reader's mind, once an author has an idea, you can't expand or use that idea. This would mean very few books after Shakespeare. Only one murder mystery allowed. Only one unrequited love story. Only one David beats

Goliath story. There was more in this reviewer's diatribe that I could rebut (such as his mistake about Tad Lincoln's date of death), but the key point is this:

When you publish a book, expect negative reviews. EVERY best seller has negative reviews, including Harry Potter books and novels by Stephen King. The goal is to just get more positive than negative reviews.

After *Out of Time*, I focused on writing an entirely different Civil War story: *Liberty Street: A Novel of Late Civil War Savannah*.

Harry Turtledove (b. 1949)

Readers not into alternative fiction are likely unaware of this author, though he is quite popular – actually famous – in this genre. The name is no pseudonym; he was born Harry Norman Turtledove, June 14, 1949, in Los Angeles.

His paternal grandparents, Romanian Jews, had first emigrated to Winnipeg, Manitoba, before moving to California. He attended UCLA as an undergraduate, and obtained a Ph.D. in 1977 in Byzantine history. His dissertation was *The Immediate Successors of Justinian: A Study of the Persian Problem and of Continuity and Change in Internal Secular Affairs in the Later Roman Empire During the Reigns of Justin II and Tiberius II Constantine (AD 565–582)*.¹

So, he's Dr. Harry Turtledove, a professional historian. In January 1979, age 33, he published his first two novels, *Wereblood* and *Werenight*. Both are in the fantasy genre, and they were published under a pseudonym, "Eric G. Iverson." The story is that his editor did not think readers would believe the author's real name was Turtledove.¹ *Wereblood* is listed on Amazon under the Iverson name, with just three reviews. *Werenight* has but two.

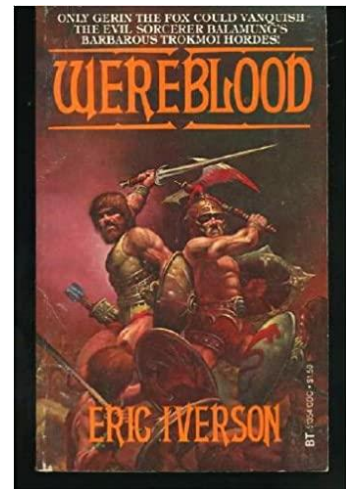
He continued to use "Iverson" until 1985, when he published *Herbig-Haro* and *Hari-Kari So to Bed* under his real name. Those two books are no longer listed on Amazon.

His fame rests largely on alternative history, of which he is an acknowledged master, an accolade conferred upon him in a review in *Publishers Weekly* back in 2008.²

Turtledove is quite prolific, and other genres for his works include historical fiction, fantasy, and science fiction. His fictional productivity is on a level with writers such as Isaac Asimov, Robin Cook, Stephen King, and James Patterson. *PW* has 61 articles on him and his books. In a *Publishers Weekly* interview published on April 11, 2011, Turtledove stated:³

Why do I write? The most basic answer, I suppose, is that I can't not do it. I've been telling stories on paper, first to myself and then to other people, for as long as I've been literate.

Being able to do it well enough to make a living at it has advantages, no doubt. I set my own hours. I eat when I'm hungry and sleep when I'm sleepy. I work on projects that I want to work on, when I want to work on them. Only one person—my editor—stands between me and my audience. For someone who spent 11½ years in the midst of an educational bureaucracy, if that's not heaven, you can sure see it from there.

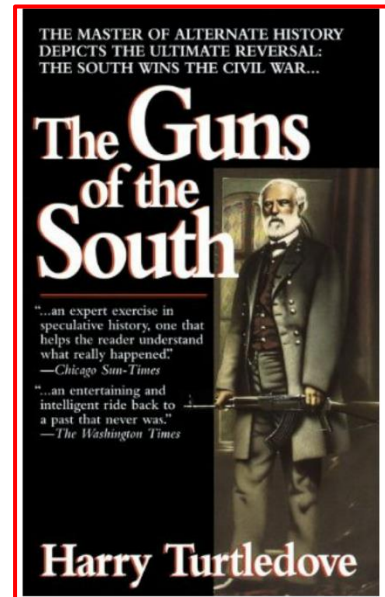


The downside to this is that I have a much tougher boss now than any other I've ever worked for. Sitting at my desk and doing nothing is not an option any more. Well, it is, but not if I feel like eating and keeping a roof over my head. Why do I write? The most basic answer, I suppose, is that I can't not do it. I'm lucky enough to manage that: usually by internalizing the loud, unpleasant voice.

Turtledove's *The Guns of the South* is not the first alternative-outcome Civil War novel. In fact, Wikipedia has a website devoted to just this topic,⁴ so it's fair game for any writer. Except for the broad idea of time travel to change the war's outcome, my novel draws nothing from Turtledove or any of the other fiction writers.

In an October 17, 2009 YouTube interview about his alternative history novels, Turtledove stated the importance of being plausible and at the same time entertaining.⁵ Plausibility still allows a science fiction conceit, but then you need to get the details right. To this end, he admitted he does a "lot of research," as did I for *Out of Time*.

While Turtledove is the acknowledged master of alternative-history, and I have written only a single novel in this genre, we do have one thing in common: his answer to the 2011 interview question "Why do I write?"



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1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_Turtledove
 2. <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/authors/interviews/article/6996-master-of-alternate-history.html>
 3. <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/authors/interviews/article/46807-why-i-write-harry-turtledove.html>
 4. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Civil_War_alternate_histories
 5. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONkJ28t-hC8>

Ayn Rand (1905 – 1982)

The authors I've chosen to profile could not be more diverse. The last three in Part I include an ex-slave, an academic historian, and now a Russian immigrant, Ayn Rand.

Why Ayn Rand? Like many young writers/readers, I was influenced by her individualist philosophy when I read *The Fountainhead*, her first bestselling novel. After reading *Atlas Shrugged* some years later, I became interested in her career arc. In crafting this book, I knew her profile needed to be included.

There is probably no more vilified bestselling author in the U.S. than Rand. She wrote four novels, but her fame rests mainly on the last two: *The Fountainhead* (1943) and *Atlas Shrugged* (1957). In addition, she wrote numerous essays and tracts on a philosophy she dubbed Objectivism, and during her life attracted a cult-like following to her ideas. This profile is mainly about her last and greatest novels.

She was born in St. Petersburg, Russia, née Alisa Zinovyevna Rosenbaum, and came to the U.S. in 1926, age twenty-one. She stayed in Chicago for six months with relatives, then moved to Los Angeles, where she worked as a screenwriter. In 1929 she married Frank O'Connor, a B-list actor, and despite her later affair with an acolyte, they stayed married until his demise on November 9, 1979.

Rand became an American citizen in 1931. She wrote a play, *Night of January 16th*, that ran on Broadway from September 1935 to early April 1936. *We the Living*, her first published novel (Macmillan) and also her first published work against communism, came out in 1936. Her next novel, *Anthem* (1938), is about a dystopian future where totalitarian collectivism rules.

Rand began writing *The Fountainhead* in the mid-1930s. Macmillan rejected it because she demanded more publicity than was given to *We The Living*. Knopf Publishing accepted the work when it was only 1/3 completed, but Rand missed two deadlines for completion (1939 and 1940), and Knopf rescinded the offer.¹

Rand's agent, Ann Watkins, then sent the early chapters out to eight different publishers, all of whom rejected the work. When Ms. Watkins suggested changing the tone of the novel, Rand fired her. She put the novel aside until a colleague at Paramount Pictures, where she was working as a reader, insisted she not give up. She agreed to try another publisher, Bobbs-Merrill. Rand delivered the chapters to a young editor at the company, recently hired, named Archibald Ogden.

Ogden loved the work, thought the book should be published, and sent it to the executive who had to make the final decision: D.L. Chambers, the president of Bobbs-Merrill in Indianapolis. Chambers rejected the book. Ogden then threatened to quit if Merrill didn't publish it, so Chambers relented, stating "Far be it from me to dampen such enthusiasm. Sign the contract." The contract gave her a year to complete the novel, which she did, turning it over to the publisher the last day of 1942.¹

The Fountainhead was delivered to bookstores on May 7, 1943. After an initial slow start, the book sold well and in November that year Rand sold the movie rights to Warner Brothers for \$50,000. She then wrote the screenplay for the movie, but its production was delayed because of the war. The movie came out in 1949, starring Gary Cooper as Howard Roark and Patricia Neal as Dominique Francon.

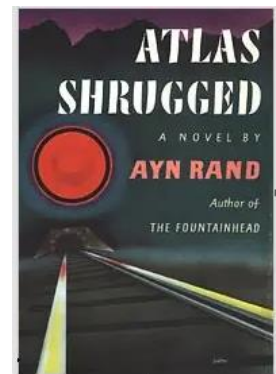
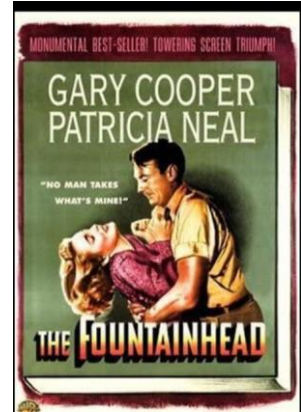
Earlier I quoted my high school journal entry from May 4, 1960, regarding future career choices, and mentioned Frank Lloyd Wright. Though I never seriously considered a career as an architect (no talent for drawing), I kept my fascination with architecture, so *The Fountainhead*, first read in college, was of special interest. I knew some of Wright's persona – his genius, his outsized ego, and his disdain for the work of conforming architects – was in Rand's main character, Howard Roark.

Next, I read Rand's first two novels, *We The Living* and *Anthem*, but didn't find them particularly engrossing, at least, not after *The Fountainhead*. Then I tackled her magnum opus, the 1168-page *Atlas Shrugged*, published October 1957 by Random House.

Rand began work on *Atlas Shrugged* in the mid-1940s (her original title was *The Strike*). The novel's hero, John Galt, rejects the socialism taking over the country and decides to call a strike of the industrialists and capitalists-- the people without whom society would fall apart.

Rand's writing style, with emphasis on individuality, heroism, and anti-collectivism, resonated with me as with so many others. Despite the critics' mostly negative reviews, *Atlas* reached number three on *The New York Times* bestseller list in December 1957 and has continued its popularity. To date, it has sold over nine million copies.

In one scene (Chapter X, Part 2), Rand's hero John Galt states what could be called the tagline of *Atlas Shrugged*. As a young engineer in Wisconsin's Twentieth Century Motors, Galt attends a company-wide meeting where the owner announces a new policy to its 6000 workers, a policy in line with what is taking place all over the country. Henceforth, all Twentieth Century employees will work according to their ability but be paid according to their need. Galt stands and announces he will put an end to such nonsense once and for all. As he starts to leave the meeting, the company's owner cries out, "How?" Galt turns and replies calmly: "I will stop the motor of the world."²

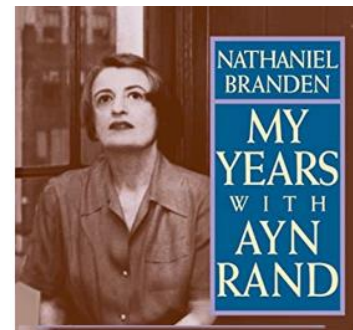


Despite the novel's enormous popularity, its length and underlying philosophy kept filmmakers away for decades. An "indie" movie was finally produced that covered the novel in three parts: Part 1 in 2011, Part 2 in 2012, and Part 3 in 2014. The productions were relatively low-budget, and a different actor portrayed John Galt in each film. Critics panned the production and all three parts lost money. Roger Ebert's review of Part 1 emphasizes a general criticism.

Let's say you know the novel, you agree with Ayn Rand, you're an objectivist or a libertarian, and you've been waiting eagerly for this movie. Man, are you going to get a letdown. It's not enough that a movie agree with you, in however an incoherent and murky fashion. It would help if it were like, you know, entertaining?³

Atlas Shrugged showcases Rand's philosophy of Objectivism, which she defined as "the concept of man as a heroic being, with his own happiness as the moral purpose of his life, with productive achievement as his noblest activity, and reason as his only absolute." (Reference 2, "About The Author"). Beginning in the 1950s, she formalized this philosophy with books, essays, speeches, and courses offered to the public.

Objectivism attracted many followers, and between 1954 and 1957 she had an affair with one of them, Nathaniel Branden, a Canadian twenty-five years her junior and, at the time, her most avid supporter. (He would later set up the Nathaniel Branden institute to teach and promote her philosophy). The affair was carried on with the consent of Branden's then spouse Barbara, and also with Rand's husband.



From the mid-1950s onward, Rand's life and career unfold like a complex soap opera. Branden, an early and strong advocate of Rand's philosophy, had a major falling out with Rand in 1968, when she found out he was having an affair with another woman not his wife, Patricia Scott. Rand castigated Branden publicly, and he responded, criticizing her *and* her philosophy. His 1989 book, *My Years with Ayn Rand*, offers a devastating critique of the woman he once loved, philosophically and sexually. The book's front cover blurb states:

The shocking story of the intimate relationship between a literary genius and a young man twenty-five years her junior—a relationship that over eighteen years, went from student and teacher, to friends, to colleagues and partners, to lovers, and ultimately to adversaries. A memoir that reveals the truth behind the myths. The story only one man can tell.⁴

After Nathaniel Branden, Leonard Peikoff (b. 1933) became Rand's philosophical torch bearer. She appointed him her legal and literary heir, and after her death, he set up the Ayn Rand Institute. New editions of her novels all have an introduction by Peikoff.

When advocates of a philosophical system begin fighting over the system's construct (as did Branden and Rand), and academicians weigh in with detailed, opposing views (google

“Objectivism Debates”), the mind of the non-philosopher (me) likely opts out. It is not necessary to “understand” objectivism to enjoy and/or be inspired by her novels. Their sales before anyone even heard much about “objectivism” prove this point.

As I began to write fiction shortly before retirement, and read more about American literature, I became aware of the vitriol heaped upon Rand and *Atlas Shrugged*. I came across a 1999 book by Rand scholar Mimi Gladstein, who wrote: “reviewers seemed to vie with each other in a contest to devise the cleverest put-downs; one called it ‘execrable claptrap,’ while another said it showed ‘remorseless hectoring and prolixity.’”⁵ Below are some excerpts from critical reviews.⁶

Los Angeles Times:

[“Atlas Shrugged”] is probably the worst piece of large fiction written since Miss Rand’s equally weighty “The Fountainhead.” Miss Rand writes in the breathless hyperbole of soap opera. Her characters are of billboard size; her situations incredible and illogical; her story is feverishly imaginative. It would be hard to find such a display of grotesque eccentricity outside an asylum.

New York Times

It has only two moods, the melodramatic and the didactic, and in both it knows no bounds.

Newsweek

Conversations deteriorate into monologues as one character after another laboriously declaims his set of values.

National Review

“Atlas Shrugged” can be called a novel only by devaluing the term. Out of a lifetime of reading...its shrillness is without reprieve. Its dogmatism is without appeal.

Though in a minority, there have also been some very positive reviews.

Hedda Hopper

Atlas Shrugged runs 1,168 pages, and you won’t want to miss one word. I couldn’t put it down, neither will you be able to once you’ve started reading. You’ll say it can’t happen here — but it’s happening every day and we sit still while watching our rights as humans being whittled away.⁶

Richard McLaughlin

He called it a “long overdue” polemic against the welfare state with an “exciting, suspenseful plot”, although unnecessarily long. He drew a comparison with the antislavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, saying that a “skillful polemicist” did not need a refined literary style to have a political impact.⁷

John Chamberlain

Newspaper critic Chamberlain found *Atlas Shrugged* satisfying on many levels: as science fiction, as a “philosophical detective story,” and as a “profound political parable.”⁸

Ronald E. Merrill

Overall, the plot of *Atlas Shrugged* is one of the greatest accomplishments of world literature. Not only is it a masterpiece of logic in itself, but it integrates perfectly the needs of the story with Rand's exposition of a series of philosophical principles.⁹

It's noteworthy that the 2018 PBS *Great American Read* television series found *Atlas Shrugged* rated number 20 out of 100 novels, based on a YouGov survey "asking Americans to name their most-loved novel."¹⁰ (*To Kill a Mockingbird* was number one.)

If *Atlas* is so well loved, why the critical calumny? Probably as many explanations as there are critics, but here are four main reasons.

Politics. She was against any political philosophy that even hinted at socialism or collectivism. If you are inclined to favor, or not find major fault with, welfare, handouts, unions, regulations, government bureaucracy, higher taxes, or any socialistic tendency, you will likely place the book somewhere between anathema and trash.

Religion. She was a confirmed atheist and considered all religions as antithetical to reason. This belief turned away religious conservatives, who otherwise generally agreed with her pro-capitalism philosophy. The most notable example in this category was William F. Buckley, Jr. For the reviewer of her book in his *National Review* magazine, Buckley chose Whittaker Chambers, a Russian and former member of the communist party who had defected to the U.S. in 1938. By the time *Atlas* came out Chambers was "a devout Christian, a Quaker, and he didn't merely disparage the novel, he set out to destroy it, partly in an attempt to discredit her defense of godless capitalism." In his review, Chambers wrote: "Atlas Shrugged can be called a novel only by devaluing the term...I find it a remarkably silly book."¹¹

Plot. Notwithstanding Ronald Merrill's high praise (quoted above), many aspects of her plot are highly unrealistic, such as the economy folding because just a relatively few key people quit their jobs, or a U.S. government with no mention of Congress, or a Colorado valley that no one can see from the air. The plot of *Atlas Shrugged* is highly contrived to allow Rand's heroes to win the battle, and this contrivance is called out by critics who don't like her message. There are dozens of popular novels with plots and settings equally unrealistic – check out "dystopian," "utopian," and "post-apocalyptic" genres – all created to make a point or project an idea. However, if the point or the idea in those novels doesn't offend, their unrealism is not apt to be criticized. Not so with *Atlas Shrugged*.

Characters. Rand avoids subtlety. Her good people are portrayed as smart, creative thinkers, independent and self-sufficient. Their enemies are stereotypically evil, incompetent, power-hungry socialists. If you are looking for literature whose theme and message are subject to interpretation, or a story with complex, ambiguous characters, you can easily find fault with the novel. True, Dagny Taggart is conflicted about her love interests, but John Galt and the other heroes, as well as the villains, leave no doubt about their philosophy of life.

Atlas Shrugged is not literature like the works of William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, or Ernest Hemingway. Of course, it is also not anything like the output of Stephen King, Robin Cook, or Tom Clancy, just to mention three hugely popular novelists whose books, far from being considered great literature, are not subjected to the calumny heaped upon Rand. But then, their novels don't advocate unbridled capitalism, condemn altruism, or give a sixty-page rant by the main character espousing the author's philosophy.

My lengthy profile on Rand – one of the longest in this book – is warranted by the impression she made when I first read her works, and the insight gained after reviewing the history of her publishing efforts and the resulting literary criticism. One doesn't have to be steeped in objectivist philosophy to appreciate the overarching theme of the individual vs. collectivist society, the evils of communism, or the power of reason. As to her persona – from the open love affair to the cult-like atmosphere among her acolytes – nothing admirable there. But we don't admire creative geniuses for their personalities or personal lives – just consider people like Picasso, Wright, Hemingway, Beethoven, and Van Gogh for starters. It's their work, their output that attracts us. So it is with Rand.

As a mostly self-published author, I think I can speak for the legions of self-published authors in regard to the criticism of her work. We would welcome this criticism if our books sold like Rand's novels. She knew how to write in a way that appeals to millions of readers. Critics who wish to vilify her fiction seem to miss the point. They seldom (if ever) address *why* her books, particularly *Atlas Shrugged*, are so widely read.

Write a great story that people want to read and you can ignore the critics.

Postscript

There are many books about Ayn Rand, covering aspects of her personal life, novels, and objectivist philosophy. On one level, she fits the mold set by Frank Lloyd Wright, who I profile in Part II: a creative genius, with a monumental ego and a sometimes scandalous personal life. For entertainment value, I recommend a 1999 movie based on Barbara Branden's biography, *The Passion of Ayn Rand*.¹² The film is available on Amazon Prime, and stars Helen Mirren as Rand.



1. Anne C. Heller, *Ayn Rand and the World She Made*. Anchor Books, 2009
2. Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*. Penguin Group (USA), 1992
3. Roger Ebert, *Chicago Sun-Times*. April 14, 2011
4. Nathaniel Branden, *My Years With Ayn Rand*. Jossey-Bass, 1999
5. Mimi Gladstein, *The New Ayn Rand Companion*. Greenwood Press, 1999; p.118
6. <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/la-xpm-2012-aug-26-la-oe-schneider-atlas-shrugged-reviews-20120826-story.html>
7. Richard McLaughlin, "The Lady Has a Message ...". *The American Mercury*. January 1958, pp. 144–146.
8. John Chamberlain, *New York Herald Tribune*. October 6, 1957
9. Ronald E. Merrill, *The Ideas of Ayn Rand*, Open Court, Chicago, 1991; p. 63
10. <https://www.pbs.org/the-great-american-read/results>
11. Heller, p. 284
12. Barbara Branden, *The Passion of Ayn Rand*. Doubleday and Co., 1986

2014: Last Year of Medical Practice

The year 2014 was my last year in medical practice. I was already cutting back, having given up weekend hospital coverage to younger colleagues. On July 14, 2014 I wrote a brief list of my main non-medical-practice activities over the years. I was not thinking at all of writing a memoir, but now I see the list as a useful waypoint between my writing while in medical practice, and writing I was to do over the next eight years. Below is that journal entry, with the list as actually written in boldface. My current commentary on these items is in regular font.

Monday, July 14, 2104 – 4 pm, at the hospital

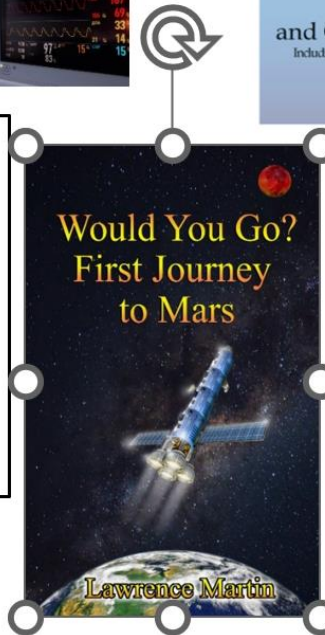
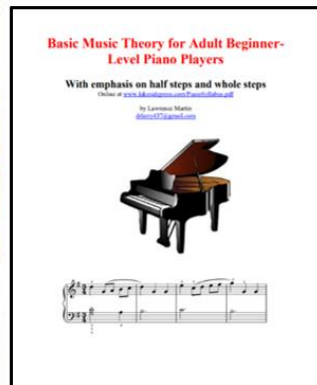
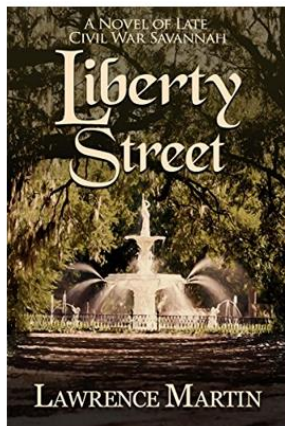
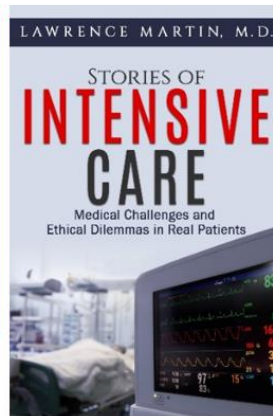
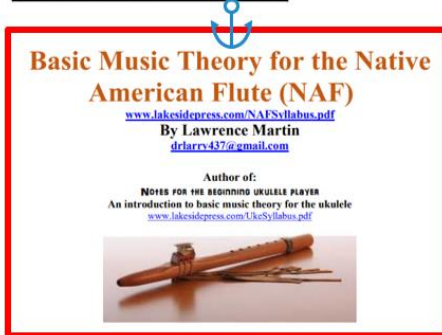
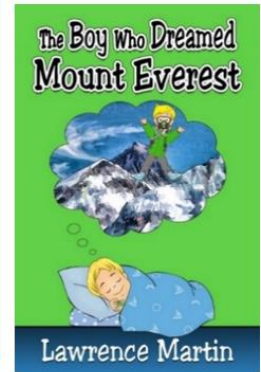
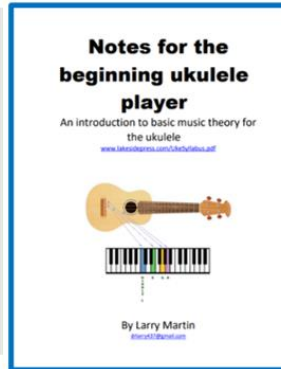
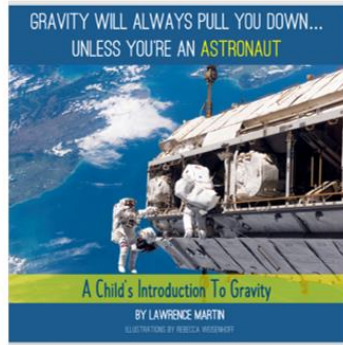
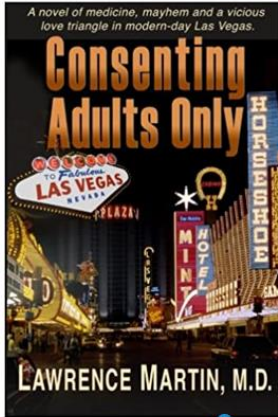
- **Writing non-fiction, first medical starting with *Breathe Easy*, then the physiology books.** See chapters on these books.
- **Sailing – reading, evening classes at Power Squadron.** Sailing was a huge activity during the years we owned a sailboat, but never resulted in any writing or websites.
- **Scuba – several certification courses (including an aborted Divemaster course), vacations built around this activity, writing *Scuba Diving Explained*, the DAN courses.** At one point I started a course to become a divemaster – someone who teaches others, but I was not cut out for it, and quit after a week. DAN is Divers Alert Network, a Duke University-based organization that teaches dive safety and conducts course for dive doctors. One year I traveled to Durham, NC to take their two-day medical course.
- **Golf – the websites, numerous golf vacations, Oakwood, Stonewater.** Oakwood was a Cleveland country club Ruth and I belonged to for several years. We quit a few years before it closed due to declining membership. Stonewater is a semi-private course we joined after Oakwood, in the subdivision of Highland Heights, OH, where we lived from 2006-2014
- **Creating Web sites – dozens of websites on as many topics; several internet-based courses (and one live course at Lakeland Comm. College). I’ve probably spent well over 2000 hours on this work since the mid-1990s.** I became adept at HTML coding, and did all my own websites. Over time I lost interest in keeping up the websites, and today they are decidedly amateurish in appearance and format.
- **Sleep Medicine – this is not a hobby or obsession, but did occupy the better part of two years studying, writing web sites, etc., before and after the [sleep] boards. Plus, trips built around [taking] sleep courses. And then helping write Kryger’s Sleep Review book; the first edition was published in 2011 and now have spent many hours on the second edition.** See chapter on this activity.

- **Scrabble – Probably several hundred hours spent playing computer scrabble the past 10 years (and still do it frequently, on iPad and iPhone).** I have continued with this activity, now exclusively on my iPhone. I know all the 2-letter combinations. Can beat the computer at second highest level about half the time.
- **Civil War – Vacations, read numerous books; Until retirement, I managed to get us to several Civil War sites during vacations.** This was facilitated by our middle daughter living in Washington, D.C. for several years. While visiting her we had easy access to Harper’s Ferry, Antietam, Gettysburg, and Manassas, VA (battles of Bull Run).
- **Writing Fiction – two self-published novels on the Civil War.** To this point, *Sherman’s Mistress in Savannah* in print and e-book formats, and *Out of Time* in e-book only.
- **Music – It’s only been a few months, but it will be my last obsession, and carry me through ‘til death (or dementia, whichever comes first).** See chapters on Music

Part II

Writing in Retirement

Book Covers – Part II



“Free Golf for Life!”

In the early 2000s we began to see television ads blaring “Free Golf for Life!” The ads were for a retirement community in Florida called The Villages, located an hour’s drive northwest of Orlando. Before those ads we had never heard of the place. At the time we lived in a development built around the Stonewater Golf Club in Highland Heights, a Cleveland suburb. Half the year we managed to play most weekends. The course closed November through April.

Stonewater was semi-private; anyone could join with an initiation fee, then you paid green fees each time you played. We certainly knew golf was not cheap, let alone free. How could this place in Florida be offering “free golf” and “for life”? Obviously a “come-on,” but it piqued our curiosity since we were thinking of eventually retiring to Florida anyway.

In 2009 we attended a medical convention in Orlando, and one afternoon drove up to The Villages. We arrived just in time for one of their real-estate sales trolley tours. What we saw intrigued us. A dozen or so 18-hole regulation courses, and triple that number of 9-hole “executive courses,” the latter indeed “free” to anyone who lived there. Of course, each homeowner paid a monthly “amenity fee” of about \$140, and that included all the executive golf courses, recreation center activities and clubs, and swimming pools. By any standard, this was a bargain. With a resident population at the time of about 100,000, there were over 2000 clubs covering almost every activity for retirees: writing, music, art, dancing, cards, sports, book clubs, and many more.

In 2010 we rented a house in The Villages for a week, and were happy with the experience, one aspect in particular. The golf is set up so that any resident (or renter) can play on any course simply by making a tee time via a simple-to-use website. Executive course tee times are nine minutes apart, and as a couple we were often paired with two other people. This method totally eliminated the one-course-only country club experience that is not only expensive, but cliquish.

We had quit a private country club for those reasons several years earlier, and were happy with the semi-private course we lived on. However, once retired, we wanted a warm-weather location, where you could play golf year-round, which pretty much meant some place in Florida. Of course, we knew private Florida country clubs would be no different than the one we had earlier left: expensive, one-course-only, and cliquish. That’s not what we wanted.

We did another one-week Villages rental in 2012, and again had a positive experience. We made tee times on several courses, and enjoyed other activities as well.

It is interesting to read a diary entry from June 2014. After a bad experience over who was paired with whom in a golf outing, and how one member had manipulated the pairings, I wrote:
This is why we don’t want country club golf in Florida, It’s all about cliques. Not for us. This affirms our decision to go to a place like The Villages, where we perceive the golf will be more democratic and open – at least a lot more opportunities to play different courses, leagues, etc.

By mid-2014 we had made three important decisions.

- Retire at the end of the year, me from pulmonary medicine and Ruth from psychiatry. Circumstances with our jobs made this decision easy. I would be 71 at the end of the year, and it felt like the time had come to retire. I was no longer doing much inpatient work, and my outpatient practice was winding down as well. As I recall, most doctors in my hospital past the age of 70 had already retired. As for Ruth, the dreaded electronic medical record was giving her fits, and she felt ready to retire as well; she turned 68 in July that year.
- Leave Cleveland and move to another state with better weather, lower taxes and cost of living . This decision was made easier by the fact that our three daughters had long since left northeast Ohio. Had one or more stayed in the area, we would have kept our home and more likely just rented in Florida for the winter months, i.e., become “snowbirds.” But they were long gone, to cities we didn’t want to move to. Joanna our oldest, was in medical practice in Chicago, married with two kids. Amy, our youngest, had graduated law school in California, but then moved to Chicago where she was doing public interest law and dating a guy she would later marry. Our middle daughter Rachel, also an attorney in public interest law, lived in a New York City suburb with her husband and two young children. Great places to visit, Chicago and New York, but we had no desire to move to either one. So the decision to become Florida residents came easily.
- Move to The Villages. The “free-golf” ad brought the place to our attention, but golf was by no means the deciding factor. The draw was and remains the plethora of activities available in such a large retirement community, which I discuss in later chapters. Once we made the decision to leave Ohio and move to Florida, choosing The Villages over, say, South Florida or the attractive cities of Florida’s Gulf Coast, was also easily made.

In the early fall of 2014 we secured a rental agreement for January-March, 2015, at a cost of \$11,750: a 3-bedroom, 2-bath home, about 1500 square feet. (Rents are much lower in the summer months.) Then, in less than a month after arriving to The Villages, we bought a house to which we would permanently move later that year.

Year of transition: 2015

We both formally retired from medicine at the end of 2014. On New Years' Day we arrived at The Villages, FL, to stay in the rental house for the next several months. After settling in we contacted a real estate agent and began searching for a house to buy. Within two weeks we found one: a standard one-level, 3-bedroom 2-bath home, situated on a pond in the back, which affords extra privacy. Like every other home in The Villages, it has no basement.

We closed on the house in April but, as long-planned, moved back to Cleveland in May to sell our Ohio home and arrange for a permanent move to Florida. However, we could not sell the Ohio home so we rented it out, and in September moved to The Villages – and became Florida residents.

We quickly adapted to the new environment and joined clubs that fit our interests: a dulcimer club for Ruth, two writing clubs for me, and several clubs that offered ukulele playing and folk music singing.

This was music and writing heaven – for retirees with time on their hands. So many people playing music! So many wannabe writers! Who could ask for anything more? (George Gershwin) And for all of these clubs all you had to do was show up. All club meetings are open. Some charge a small fee (\$5-20 a year) if you want to be on their email list.

Five days after arriving in The Villages, I wrote the following in my journal.

Jan 6, 2015

[Today] we went to first of 10 music groups we plan to attend this week! This first one of the week is run by Rita Dorigo and is called STRUMMING UKELELIANS. It meets at Laurel Manor [one of many recreation centers that holds club meetings], 1:30 – 3:20 on Mondays. All the music groups we are interested in are listed as follows...That's 10 music groups, 7 of them ukulele (including one banjolele).

| | |
|-------------|--|
| Monday - | STRUMMING UKLELELIANS GOODRICH FOLK MUSIC CLUB |
| Tuesday – | HUMMERS & STRUMMERS INTERMEDIATE UKE CLUB BANJOLELE STRINGS DULCIMER CLUB VILLAGES UKELELE CLUB |
| Wednesday – | DULCIMER FOR BEGINNERS MOUNTAIN DULCIMER 1 UKELELE FOR BEGINNERS |
| Thursday – | UKELELE PLAYERS |
| Friday – | UKE GROUP |

The above list is just music clubs. I joined a writing critique group that met weekly, and also the Writers League of The Villages, an umbrella club which promotes writing among all Villages residents, including a yearly book fair (discussed in chapter on WLOV). Early in retirement, I was like the proverbial kid in the candy store. So much to do! So much to learn!

The first week in my critique group I just sat back and listened. The second week it was my turn to read. But read what? I decided on an excerpt from *Sherman's Mistress in Savannah*. Most members liked it, but the group's leader had one specific criticism: "Larry in your scene you varied the point of view, shifting from one character to another. That can confuse the reader."

This was the first time I had heard about "point of view" in fiction. I had written a full-length novel, not knowing anything about the supposed rules of writing. Until *Sherman's Mistress*, almost all my writing was nonfiction, which doesn't deal with point of view (always the author's), character development, plot, or dialogue. Thus began my learning curve for fiction, which has continued ever since.

By the end of 2015 I had published a number of books and felt the desire to "teach" others how to do it: So, in December I arranged an outline of my recommendations, titled "4 Steps to Writing a Book for Publication." I gave this talk a couple of times. The full outline is in [Appendix D](#). Below are my 4 Steps.

4 Steps to Writing a Book for Publication.

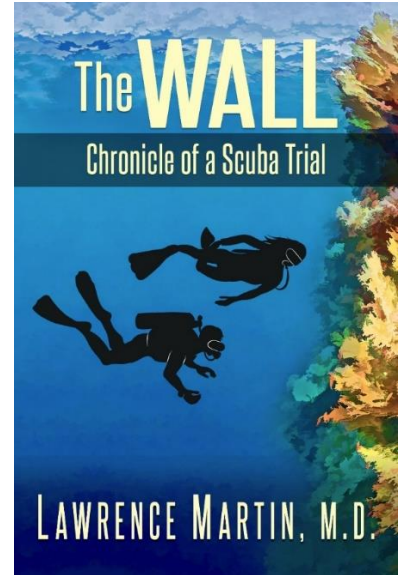
- 1. Get an idea**
- 2. Write obsessively**
- 3. Review and edit – over and over**
- 4. Publish**

The Wall: Kindle Edition

In 1998 I had posted online a novella about a civil trial over the death of a young woman scuba diver. It combined my expertise about scuba and my knowledge of civil litigation. It stayed on my lakesidepress.com website for 17 years, until 2015 when I decided to publish it as an e-book. Because the book is short (just under 50,000 words), I decided to leave it as an e-book, and that was its only Amazon-available format for five years.

It reads like a real trial but is entirely fictional. There is good testimony on both sides of the case, and at the end of the trial the reader is asked to make a decision: diver suicide or corporate negligence.

To set up the trial, I crafted the first chapter around the fatal dive, which takes place in the Cayman Islands fourteen months before the trial. The book opens with these paragraphs.



1. THE DIVE

The Caribbean water is shimmering and blue, transparent on this sunny day. The dive boat ties up at a preset mooring so no anchor will disturb the delicate coral beneath. One by one, nine scuba divers jump off the boat. Each diver has requisite air tank and regulator, face mask and fins, and most are clad in a brightly-colored, thin wet suit to protect from accidental abrasions.

A young woman, Charlene, is the leader or dive master, and she will be the underwater guide. The other eight are diving for pleasure and buddied up for safety, like kids at a summer camp swim. Four buddy pairs. The group treads water on the surface next to the boat until Charlene asks for the OK sign. Each diver forms an "O" with thumb and forefinger signaling "I'm OK."

"Let's go!" she says, and the dive commences.

The "wall" of the title is a vertical drop off that starts about 45 feet from the surface and goes down 3000 feet. Since recreational divers are limited to a total depth of about 130 feet, you can only dive at the highest part of the wall.

I put simple line drawings in the book, and introduce them in the court proceedings for the jury. Here is one of the wall.



The civil trial covers the entire novella, except for Chapter 1 and an Epilogue. I put myself in as a defense witness, and in court show the cover of my nonfiction book, *Scuba Diving Explained*. The trial takes place in 2014, before my retirement. Below are a few excerpts, starting with me on the witness stand.

The jurors are led in, seated, and just before 9:30 the trial resumes. Kirkland calls in his first witness for the defense, a middle-aged guy with a short, stocky build, wearing a dark blue suit.

“Please state your name and position.”

“Dr. Lawrence Martin. I am Clinical Professor of Medicine at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine, here in Cleveland, and Chief of the Pulmonary Division at Mt. Sinai Hospital.”

“You are a lung doctor, is that right?”

“Yes, pulmonary is the medical term for lung.”

“Would you please explain to the jury what a lung doctor does?”

“Basically, we take care of adult patients with lung diseases, like asthma, bronchitis, pneumonia, conditions like that. I also work in the intensive care unit where we take care of the critically ill patients, on life-support or breathing machines.”

“So you are familiar with the kinds of conditions that can befall divers, such as the bends, air embolism, nitrogen narcosis?”

“Oh, yes. Those are very uncommon conditions and rarely seen in routine clinical practice, but I have studied and am familiar with them.”

“Dr. Martin, you have written a book on scuba diving, is that correct?”

“Yes, it’s called *Scuba Diving Explained: Questions and Answers on Physiology and Medical Aspects of Scuba Diving*.”

“And this is the book?” Kirkland holds up for the jury a trade paperback with the title *Scuba Diving Explained* emblazoned in yellow across the top. He hands the book to Dr. Martin.

“Yes.”

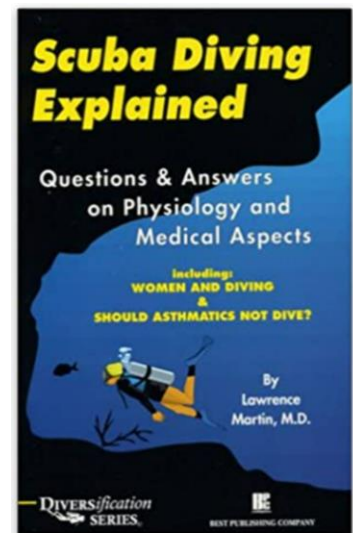
“And who is the intended audience for such a book?”

“Well, anyone who scuba dives, or plans to, and wants to learn more about the physiology and medical aspects. This is not a medical textbook. I wrote it for the general public, for anyone who has ever taken a basic certification course, or plans to.”

After a few more questions about my qualifications, the defense attorney asks for my opinion.

“My opinion is that she consciously wanted to sink to impossible depths and was determined not to survive.”

“OBJECTION! Dr. Martin has no basis for that assertion! It is pure speculation and way out of line!”



“Your Honor—” Kirkland responds, but he is abruptly cut off by a high-pitched voice from the gallery.

“Liar! My daughter did not want to kill herself! That’s just not true!” Jennie’s mother, sobbing now, is standing and pointing her finger at Dr. Martin. Mr. Knowlton and their daughter take hold of her arms, to get her to sit back down. Before they can accomplish this goal she slumps to the floor.

“Get a doctor!” someone yells. “Is there a doctor in the courtroom?” Reflexively, Dr. Martin stands up to go to her aid, then looks at the judge, who for the moment seems perplexed. Court protocol demands he stay put. Common sense dictates that he help.

“Go on, please attend to her,” says the judge, and in a louder voice, “Bailiff, summon help.”

And so it goes, another day in the courtroom. This being fiction, I create a situation where the prosecuting attorney attempts to discredit my testimony.

“Dr. Martin, I am Chester Pearson and as you’ve already testified, we have met before.”

“Yes.”

“Now, you stated that you don’t treat divers, but you do answer medical questions about diving if called, is that correct?”

“Yes. My main interest is asthma and diving, and I get called about that quite frequently.”

“Do you ever get called about nitrogen narcosis?”

“Well, no, people who might have had nitrogen narcosis are fine when they get to the surface.”

“So, you don’t have any personal experience in treating nitrogen narcosis?”

“Well, no, there is no treatment once you’re back on the surface.”

“Have you ever been involved in an autopsy of a diver?”

“No, I am not a pathologist.”

“Have you ever been involved in any formal inquiry into the death of a diver?”

“No, we don’t have many deaths from diving in this area, but to answer your question, no.”

“Are you aware of the Northeast Ohio Scuba Rescue Team, professionals on call who go out to remove drowned divers out of quarries and lakes in Northeast Ohio?”

“Well, I’ve read about them. I know that there are one or two scuba diving deaths a year in the quarries around here. Usually, divers who are inebriated.”

“Are you a medical member of any of those rescue teams, the Cuyahoga, Lake County, Summit County teams?”

“No, I am not. But I’m also not aware that any practicing physician is a member of those teams.”

“Have you ever been asked to consult with any of those teams?”

“No.”

“Have you ever been consulted by any official agency at any time to give an opinion on why a diver drowned or had a fatal accident?”

“No, I haven’t.”

“And you don’t do any work with a hyperbaric chamber?”

“No, that’s not correct. I work with a hyperbaric chamber on a limited basis, but I don’t run the chamber, I’m not in charge of the program.”

“Who is?”

“A vascular surgeon in our hospital.”

“Well, what kind of hyperbaric patients do you work with?”

“I am occasionally consulted on patients receiving hyperbaric oxygen therapy for carbon monoxide poisoning, or who have surgical and pulmonary problems and are receiving hyperbaric treatments. And I am occasionally asked to interpret blood oxygen levels in chamber patients. So I am familiar with hyperbaric chambers but it is not my main focus. And as I said, we don’t see diving accidents in Cleveland, at least not at our hospital.”

“I understand. But there are experts in this country who do run a hyperbaric facility, who do treat diver injuries, who do have first-hand medical experience treating the bends and other diver injuries, are there not?”

“Yes, of course there are, but they are few and far between.”

“But you’re not one of them, are you?”

“By them, you mean someone who specializes in diver-related injuries?”

“Yes.”

“No.”

“Then tell me doctor, how in heaven’s name can you come before this court today and opine on the death of a beautiful young woman who disappeared while scuba diving off Grand Cayman Island? What experience do you —”

“Objection!” calls out Kirkland. “Mr. Pearson is badgering the witness.”

“Sustained. Mr. Pearson, please ask one question at a time, and give the doctor a chance to answer.”

Postscript

The Kindle version received some very positive reviews, and in 2020 I published a print edition, followed by an audio book on Audible.com. In 2021 *The Wall* won a Bronze RPLA in the Published Novella category. The print and audio versions are covered in a later chapter

Writer's Block, Journaling, and File Backup

The term “writer’s block” generally means inability to continue writing for some mental reason. It sometimes refers only to a work already begun, but other times to inability to write anything. I’ve had writer’s pauses, writer’s confusion, writer’s doubt, but never full-scale “block.” There was always something I could write.

I don’t teach writing, and never took a formal course on the craft, though I’ve plowed through lots of YouTube videos, lectures, and tomes on writing. But after writing twenty-five books I do have opinions. Writers can always write something, if they have the desire. The one thing always available is a personal journal. Writing a journal for many years not only kept me in a writing frame of mind, but the result has been invaluable in putting this book together. Memories fade, dates and names are forgotten, opinions change. Write all this stuff down, daily if possible.

Complete writer’s block should not be an issue for writers. Write about what you had for breakfast, what you did that day, your golf score, the movie you hated, the moron jabbering on cable news.

The internet is full of other suggestions for “writer’s block.” One of the more popular ones is “writer’s prompts,” random ideas that you could write about. Google “writers prompts” to see some of these – hundreds, thousands. You can have them emailed to your inbox weekly.

I never use writer’s prompts. I have all the prompts I need in my head.

Another suggestion, for those stymied when writing a novel, is to abandon the idea of writing the next scene, but skip around. If you’re in the middle of the work, and can’t figure out what should come next, write the ending. Write a review of the work as if it was finished. Write two reviews, one praising the book, the other hypercritical. Write a rejection letter from an agent, or a publisher. Write a new character, maybe the grandfather of the protagonist, who emigrated from Russia in the nineteenth century.

I once got into the habit of writing “fictitious reviews,” that is, reviews of books and movies that only existed in my mind. It was fun writing these fictions, and I posted them on the internet. Below is the link and website headline. On the next page are the introduction and a title list, followed by opening paragraphs of three fictitious reviews. The third one is a fictitious review of a movie – when I wrote it such a movie did not exist.

<http://www.lakesidepress.com/fictitious-reviews/intro.html>.



FICTITIOUS REVIEWS

- [The Blue Sphere, and Other Tales of First Contact](#)
- [Movie review: The Duel](#)
- [Avoiding Civil War: The Remarkable Presidency of Hannibal Hamlin, 1861-1869](#)
- [Earthling's Guide to ISS III and the Moon](#)
- [Off Broadway: Mr. Lincoln's Proclamation](#)
- [Sunshine in Cleveland](#)
- [The Last Days of Ambrose Bierce](#)
- [Report from Leisureville](#)
- [Last Train to Memphis: The Rise of Elvis Presley](#)
- [IZ - What a Wonderful \(but too short\) Life](#)

Fictitious Reviews are just what the name indicates: reviews of works that don't exist. This includes books, movies, TV shows, restaurants -- anything that (if it existed) could be subject to a written review. Fictitious Reviews is a chance for authors to fantasize about what they would like to see, read or experience. Since the actual work or place doesn't exist, the review is a substitute. Have a book or movie you wish existed? No problem, write a review! Some place you'd like to visit but can't (because it doesn't exist) -- fantasize and write a review! Put your review on the internet and let me know about it. If it's well-written and researched, I'll provide a link.

SUNSHINE IN CLEVELAND

You gotta either love Cleveland or hate it

Book Review by Howard Darling

This is one sick novel. The premise is that Cleveland, poster-child city for mortgage foreclosures, loss of population to the South and all-around declining economy, is reborn through a series of humongous natural disasters. What happens everywhere else affects here – global warming, earthquakes and a tsunami lead millions of expatriates to return to their Midwestern roots...

EARTHLING'S GUIDE TO ISS III AND THE MOON

Zero-gravity sex and an out-of-this world casino

Book Review by Jim Huntington

Until this book came along, I didn't even know there was an "International Travel Fiction Writing Contest." Yet it's 5 years old, and this year's winner is a Frommer-like guide to the ISS (that's International Space Station) III and the Moon. It's like any travel book you might pick up today that includes the principal destination and a more out of the way place, say "Guide to Boston and Cape Cod", or "Guide to Nassau, Bahamas and the Out Islands.". Except for one thing: the ISS III doesn't exist and no amount of money is getting you to the moon any time soon...

THE DUEL

A fateful fight, now in film.

Movie review by Howard Gimble

Movie biography doesn't have to include the subject's whole life, or even most it, to rivet our attention. For every Ghandi epic there are minor masterpieces, like *The Train Station* (Tolstoy's last days) or *The King's Speech* (George VI's stuttering). *The Duel* keeps its focus on the familiar Burr-Hamilton gunfight in 1804, but is as much about Hamilton as any biopic could be (in fact, there is none save for a few TV documentaries)...

One more example of writing about anything that comes to mind. I have a pet peeve about restaurants, and sometimes argue with foodies about what I think are the most important aspects of dining out. They tend to get annoyed with my cogent argument that it's *not* the food. So, in 2021 I decided to write a short essay explaining my position. I titled the piece "My Rant on Restaurants...and Restaurant Reviews" and read it in my critique group. Some of the members agreed with me. It's a short piece, included in [Appendix D](#).

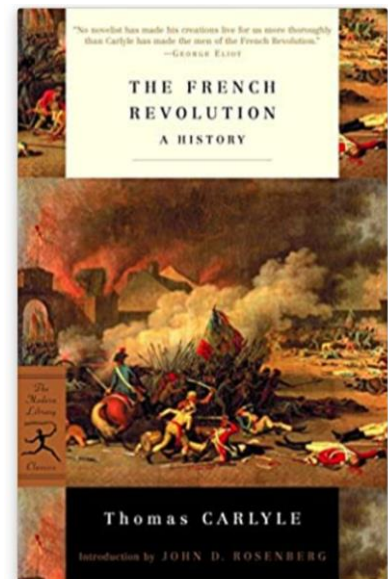
So, yes, you can always write *something*.

As for journaling, long before the internet I started with a handwritten notebook, and changed over to the computer in the 1980s. I learned the hard way that computer files are not reliable. For reasons I don't understand, as I changed computers and installed newer versions of Word, some of the old files became corrupted, and lost. Several years ago, I began putting all my digital files into one of the backup clouds, but too late for many entries written in the 1980s. Lost.

My suggestion is to not rely solely on a single file if you type into the computer, but to keep at least two backups; one could be in the cloud and the other on an external drive. The same goes for drafts of your book in progress. Another option, for a single manuscript in progress, is to save it as a pdf (portable document format) file, then email it to yourself. Pdf files take up less bytes than a Word file for emailing, and once emailed to yourself can be easily retrieved and re-converted to Word. Even if your computer dies, having the file in email such as google.com means it's always retrievable.

Note that paper copies have their own risk of being lost or destroyed: due to floods, fires, theft or that voracious dog that also eats kids' homework. One famous case of loss by fire is that of Scottish author Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), who wrote a monumental history, *The French Revolution*, the first volume of which he finished in 1835. He asked his friend John Stuart Mill to read the draft of Volume I. While reading the book, Mill fell asleep in his chair near a lit fireplace, and the unbound pages fell to the floor. His maid came in, saw the mess on the floor and threw the whole thing onto the fire. Burned to a crisp. At least that's what Mill apparently told Carlyle, though no one knows for sure. Since they were potential literary rivals, perhaps Mill had placed the manuscript in a trash pile, and neglected to inform the maid. Whatever actually happened, Carlyle's draft was lost. Incredibly, he rewrote Volume I from memory and it was published in 1837 to glowing reviews (three volumes total).

Some combination of printed paper and cloud backup of a computer file will best preserve anything important. Do not rely on a single digital file to back up your work.



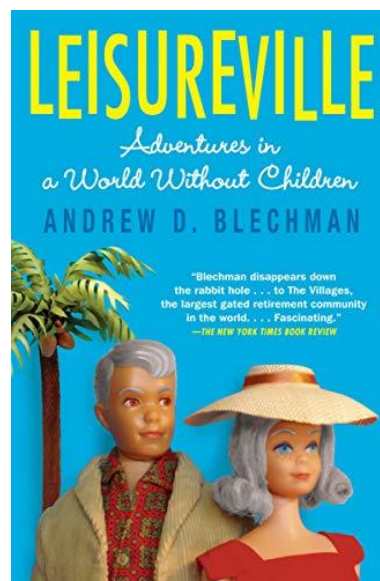
The Villages, FL – A Rebuttal

To introduce you to The Villages, Florida, take this multiple-choice quiz. All of the following are true *except one*.

1. The Villages was originally founded as a trailer park, in the late 1970s.
2. It is the fastest-growing planned community in the country, spanning three counties, with over 135,000 residents.
3. The average age of residents, most of whom are retirees, is between 60 and 70.
4. It has over 3500 clubs, covering hundreds of activities, including music, writing, dance, art, card playing, multiple sports, and a variety of discussion and book clubs.
5. National media coverage of The Villages, including video documentaries, is generally positive and laudatory.

You likely got it right. The correct answer is number 5. National media coverage, including video documentaries, tend toward the hypercritical, the putdown, the negative image.

Why is that? For an answer, we can start with a popular book by Andrew Blechman, published in 2008 when The Villages (TV) was about a third the size it is now. He wrote the book after a senior couple, neighbors of his in a small Massachusetts town, had retired to The Villages. Curious why they would leave their collection of friends and acquaintances to move to a place where they knew no one, a place “without children,” he visited them for a month. During that month Blechman conducted numerous interviews and experienced the “life style” of his hosts. Then, adding what he learned from extensive research on “age-segregated” communities, he wrote *Leisureville* and subtitled it, perjoratively, “Adventures in a World Without Children.”



The book is entertaining and well-written, but basically a hit job on “age-segregated” retirement communities, where children cannot reside. He gives the history of this type of community, in Arizona and elsewhere. The idea of the nation’s seniors flocking to these childless enclaves bothered him a great deal. For negatives, he highlighted about: sexual escapades of some seniors and the above average amount of sexually transmitted diseases among residents; golf and golf-cart transportation obsessions; the entirely-made-up history posted on official-looking plaques in the town squares; and other quirks of the place.

He also decried that one family owned much of The Villages, and that there is no true democratic government like in a real town or village. And, not least among his concerns: the seniors’ migration to The Villages removed tax-paying citizens from states that have a state income tax, and often local income taxes as well, to a state (Florida) with neither.

So, to summarize (and you should read the book) Blechman was against age-segregated communities that deprive northern cities of diversity (less seniors) and taxes, that exclude children, and that are run by a non-democratic government. He likened the whole trend as one of retiring seniors dropping out of society.

Okay, that was years ago. Then we entered the Trump era, and the mainstream media's antipathy to The Villages went into frenzy mode. It became well-publicized that The Villages is overwhelmingly white, that it voted Republican in all elections, and that the founding family running the Villages, the Morses, has long been a top donor to Florida's Republican party. That set the juices flowing, and led to several documentaries and news articles painting TV in a negative light: Republican; Trump; no diversity; no democratic government. The list goes on.

To counter the negative image so often portrayed, I will present a few observations, which are largely ignored or downplayed by left-leaning media.

- People vote with their feet. To decry people moving of their own free will, from one location to another, is to negate the world's history. Numerous examples: the Pilgrims; the 19th-century European immigrants to America; the movement of Mormons from the East to Utah; the depopulation of America's cities as the middle class moved to the suburbs; the Great Migration of Blacks to the North in the early 20th century. People move for various reasons, and to characterize their decision as "dropping out," and see it as a blot on the social construct, is elitist. Worse, it suggests an attitude that would support legislation to limit individual freedom.
- The Villages is booming, and for years has been the fastest growing metropolitan area in the country. People move here from all over, every state of the Union. There are also residents here from Canada and Great Britain, who can stay up to six months a year before returning home. The weather is certainly a draw, but so are the abundance of activities, a lower cost of living compared to most northern urban areas, and the lower taxes. And it's only a small part of Florida, which in 2022 had the fastest-growing population in the country — the first time the state has taken the top spot since 1957.

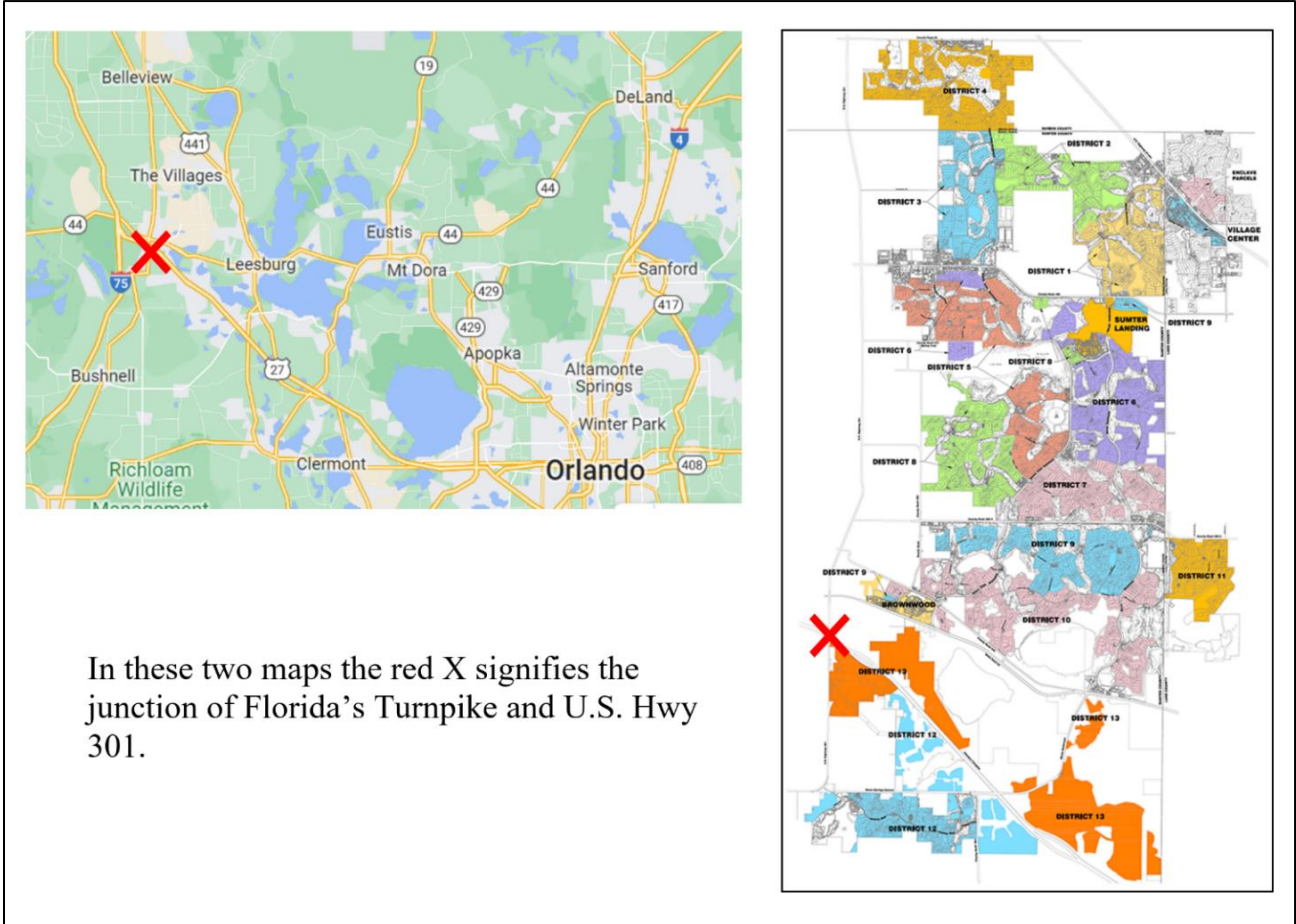


Aerial view of one "village" in The Villages, FL



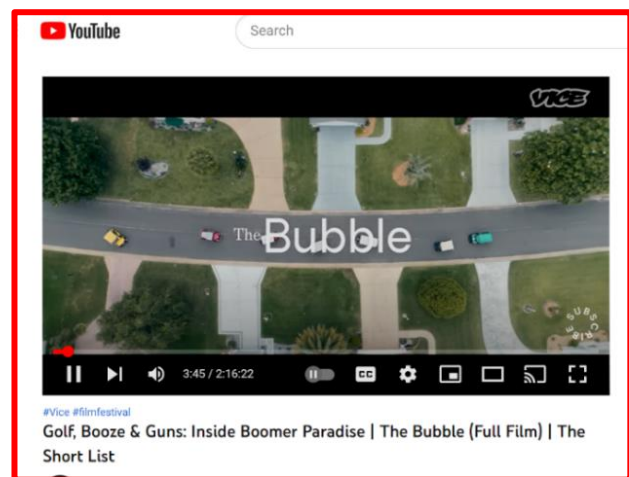
Residents can drive from their home to any place in The Villages via golfcart.

- The Villages now covers approximately 55 square miles, an hour northwest of Orlando by car (see map). It is comprised of about 60 individually-named villages divided into 13 Community Development Districts (CDDs), shown on the second map. <https://www.districtgov.org/yourdistrict/districtMapDetail.aspx?district=2>
- Each village has a population ranging roughly between five hundred to twenty-five hundred, or about 10,000 residents per CDD. Each CDD *does not* have its own mayor, vice mayor, police, or fire department; those personnel, and the functions they serve, are part of the county in which residents live. (The Villages spans three: Sumter, Lake, and Marion). Contrast this with the Cleveland suburbs, of which I'm familiar, consisting of many small towns and villages, each with a cadre of paid officials. There is, for example, the city of Mayfield Heights (pop. @ 19,000) and contiguous Mayfield Village (pop. @ 3500), each with its own mayor, town counsel, and administrative staff. Then there are the three contiguous "W" suburbs Willoughby (population @ 22,000), Willowick (pop. @ 14,000), and Wickliff (pop. @ 13,000) with their own officials and staffs. A little further east are Kirtland and Mentor-on-the-Lake, each with a population of about 7,000. And there are many more small towns and villages in the metro area. Result? Very high property taxes to pay for all the duplicated services and personnel. The Villages doesn't have this issue, and one hopes it never will.



- Among seniors, there is no more sexually transmitted disease (STD) here than anywhere else, A comment was made years ago by a local physician that she was seeing a lot of STD. Somehow the doctor’s comment got re-translated into an erroneous statistic, and Blechman fell for it. Florida Health Department statistics show that Sumter County, the population of which is mostly Villagers, actually has a low STD rate.
- The Villages is not a world without children. It’s a place where children can’t live permanently. Immediately surrounding The Villages are numerous communities with young families. Adjacent to The Villages are two charter schools, serving pre-K through 12th grade, with over 3500 students. The second one opened in 2023. The first, opened years ago, has consistently ranked high in math and science scores. Many people who live in The Villages have grandchildren, and kids come here all the time to visit. There are special camp activities for kids during Christmas, spring break, and summer months. At least a third of the residents are snowbirds, which means they travel back to their home state for a great part of the year to be with family. It is just that children (defined as under eighteen) can’t live here permanently. That’s fine with the residents, who have not “dropped out” of society.

- None of video documentaries paint a true picture of the available activities. They focus on frilly things like senior cheerleaders, social clubs, drinking, or golf-cart designs. Or, they focus on unhappy people, as a *New York Times* documentary did a few years ago (“Some Kind of Heaven”). Another video documentary is titled “Golf, Booze & Guns. Inside Boomer Paradise” (available on YouTube). That’s like doing a general



documentary on New York City for people who have never been there and calling it “Crime, Homelessness, and Heavy Traffic.” These documentaries don’t mention the extensive music and writing activities in The Villages, the concerts, the discussion clubs, the Enrichment Academy that offers a variety of courses. And they don’t highlight the volunteer work done by thousands of Villagers, or the college scholarship programs sponsored by several clubs, e.g., the Opera Club, and Writers League of the Villages. If all you want to do is denigrate, it’s easy to pick out whimsical things or unhappy people in any community, and focus on just those.

- Print articles are no better. *The New York Times* published a review March 3, 2022, titled “The ‘Disney’ for Boomers Puts Hedonism on Full Display.” It’s author, Michelle Cottle, a member of the Times editorial board, focused mainly on politics and hedonism, only briefly mentioning a few non-frilly activities. She did not do her homework, bringing up the STD angle with: “...for years, the community has fought its reputation (based in part on a 2008 book) as a den of sexual iniquity, where seniors get jiggy in golf carts and

S.T.D.s run rampant.” Here she was referring to the misinformation in *Leisureville*, but made no reference to the reputation possibly being “undeserved.” The word for such writing is “biased.” And, she could not avoid that old canard about Disney, in both the title and the text, stating “The enclave has been called Disney for retirees. The comparison is apt, not only because of the nonstop amusements.” Yes, like dozens of book clubs, discussion clubs that deal with a variety of topics, a dozen writing critique clubs, dozens of music clubs which you have to audition for, computer clubs, language clubs, and so much more. Stuff you won’t find at Disney, but never mentioned by Ms. Cottle. To its credit, *The Times* did publish a few rebuttal letters, two by Villages residents, that pointed out the extraordinary bias and omissions in Cottle’s article.



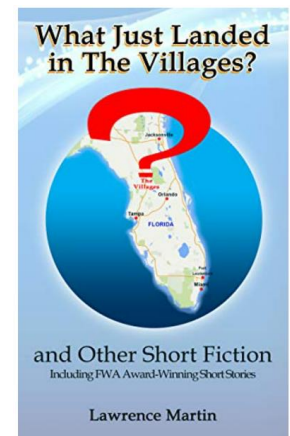
Opinion

The ‘Disney’ for Boomers Puts Hedonism on Full Display

- A frequent criticism of The Villages, brought up by Ms. Cottle, is lack of racial diversity. Only about 1 percent of the population is Black, but nothing prevents Blacks from moving here. There is a large African-American Club, and the Black residents we’ve met love the place. Furthermore, critics of our lack of diversity never seem to criticize northern cities that are similarly non-diverse racially. Great Barrington Mass is 95% white, 2% African American. Hastings-on-Hudson, NY, where our middle daughter lives, is 87% white, less than 3% African-American. One doesn’t read any criticism of these places for their “lack of diversity.”
- A main reason for the negative press is largely political. Florida has turned Republican in recent years, and although The Villages has a large Democratic Party club, it does vote Republican. Left-leaning media like the NYT can’t abide that, so at every opportunity they will paint a negative picture. When Trump was running for president in 2020, all you saw on CNN were pictures of golf carts with Trump signs. CNN did not show the carts with Biden signs, of which there were many. If you want to criticize something, it’s easy to do by omitting information and presenting just one side.
- The original founder of The Villages was Harold Schwartz (1910-2003), who started out with a trailer park in the late 1970s. In the 1980s he joined with his son H. Gary Morse to expand the development into a large retirement community. They named it “The Villages” in 1992. As more and more houses were built and sold, Morse became a billionaire. (Blechman never got to meet Gary Morse, who died in 2014, but he is mentioned in the book.) The Villages is now run by 3rd and 4th generation family members. The place is generally well run, but of course every community will have conflicts, disagreements, and opinions about how to manage things. Sometimes these result in lawsuits, and any business the scale of The Villages is likely to find itself the defendant or plaintiff quite often. Having been the victim of injustice in our Cleveland house lawsuit (see “Lawsuit!”), I can sympathize with those who feel wronged in any business situation. The problem is not that there are negative things to write or show

about a place as large as TV. The problem is that the media I've encountered never seeks to present a true or balanced picture. It is, in a word, *biased*.

- One Villages institution ripe for criticism by many residents is the daily newspaper, *The Villages Daily Sun*. This is a corporate organ, owned by the developer, and of course avoids printing almost anything negative about TV. It does print a fair amount of syndicated national and international news, and has a comprehensive sports section. Given the huge amount of local advertising, the *Daily Sun* is probably one of the most profitable dailies in the country. But it's not the paper to read if you're looking for negative local news. For that you can go to the website villages-news.com, which reports just about every arrest for shop lifting, disorderly conduct, and driving while intoxicated. Residents who want another print newspaper can subscribe to *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, or *The Orlando Sentinel*, and have them delivered same day to their home.
- The local Barnes & Noble now supports local authors by displaying for sale, in one section near the café, the mostly self-published books by Villages Residents. This has taken place only since 2021, following a change in B&N ownership and lobbying by Writers League of The Villages. On the shelf you'll find (plug!) my book, *What Just Landed in The Villages and Other Short Fiction*; the title story is a tongue-in-cheek account of the sudden landing, on a Villages golf course, of a huge monolith from outer space. The writing culture in The Villages is thriving (discussed in another chapter), one of many positive aspects unreported in the documentaries that only want to compare the place to a Disney theme park.
- Sports are very big in The Villages, encouraging physical activity. There are multiple opportunities to participate in pickleball, golf, softball, tennis, swimming, bowling, and other sports. Golf is special. Unlike private courses throughout the country, the courses in The Villages are run in a totally open, democratic manner. You can sign up for tee times via a website, and play any of the 42 "executive" (nine-hole) courses or 12 "championship" courses (eighteen holes). The executive courses are free if you walk them, and if you use your golf cart there is only a yearly trail fee. The championship courses have a greens fee, the amount depending on the time of year and the course. The main point is that golf is widely available, and open to all Villagers: the antithesis of the expensive and cliquish country clubs we played at in Ohio.
- For seniors The Villages is a much safer place to live than northern cities. Major crime (rape, murder, grand larceny) is very rare. Also, there is less risk of falling (no snow and ice), or climbing injuries, since almost all homes are built without stairs. If you need your smoke detector batteries changed, the fire department comes out to your house for free, climbs a ladder and does it. They don't want seniors climbing ladders if possible.
- Little things. Every place in the Villages is golf-cart accessible: grocery stores, medical offices, banks, etc. If you drive a car or golf cart, you never pay to park; no parking meters.



Most intersections of main streets are connected by roundabouts, no lights. Thus, you can drive smoothly from one end of The Villages to another with very few stoplights. Though not adjacent to a big city, there is no lack of shopping, with all the big box stores close by. The Orlando Airport, an hour away, is one of the nation's busiest, so you can get to many destinations without having to change planes.

I will repeat the first item. *People vote with their feet.* Critics should ask why so many have voted to move to The Villages, and continue to do so, then attempt to give an unbiased review, or at least a more balanced one.

WLOV and the WLOV Newsletter

Most Villages residents are retirees, free to pursue their varied interests. When we moved here in 2015, you could find a club for just about activity, from art to music, from softball to pickleball, from civil discourse to philosophy. I joined a few clubs centered on writing, while Ruth joined dulcimer groups. Together, we also attended ukulele groups.

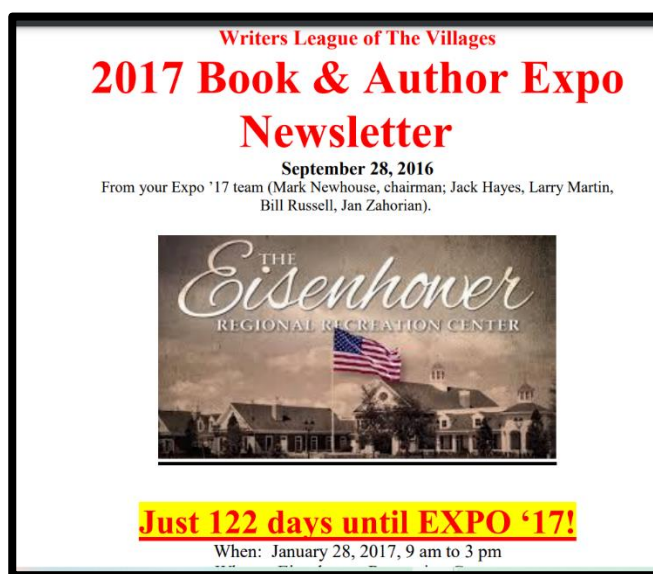
As to music -- so many retired musicians! In 2015 I counted about seventy music clubs. At least half of them required you to audition for membership: all the performing ensembles, plus a couple of full-scale orchestras and choral groups. The other music clubs were open to all residents, if you had any familiarity with some instrument. This group included a half-dozen ukulele clubs, the dulcimer groups, a Beatles Music club, a Monday night folk music group, and others.

I joined two writing critique groups, which met weekly. I also joined a large non-critique writing club, Writers League of the Villages, WLOV. WLOV was formed in 2011 to promote Villages' authors. Its focus from the start has been on education (speakers at monthly meetings) and promotion (an annual Villages Book Expo, among other activities). In 2015-2016 there were about 100 members, most of them active writers with published books.

In 2016 I volunteered for a committee to plan the next WLOV Book & Author Expo, to be held in January 2017. Given my experience with producing a hospital newsletter in Cleveland, I decided to start one for WLOV. I put together the very first WLOV newsletter September 2016, and sent it out to all the members. It was five pages long. (See screen shot of part of first page.)

My committee work and the newsletter drew the attention of WLOV's president, John Mallon. In late September 2016, John asked if I would consider running for president-elect for 2017. After a year of learning the ropes under the 2017 president, I would then become the WLOV president for 2018. Somewhat flattered, I said yes. After all, I was retired, so I had the time. Facing no opposition, at the October 2016 general meeting I was officially voted in as WLOV president-elect for 2017.

Well, it didn't turn out that way. The 2017 president-elect, who was scheduled to become president in 2018, abruptly resigned from her position. That meant...drum roll...that I would be president in 2017. What about the need for a year "to learn the ropes"?



“Don’t worry,” John said. “You’ll do fine.” So, in January 2017, I started my tenure as president of WLOV. This meant attending and running monthly WLOV Board meetings (six-eight people); running the monthly general meetings, arranging for speakers at our meetings and, not least, finding people to fill vacancies opening up for 2018: a new president; membership chairperson; communications director.

Well, I survived, and the club continued to grow. At this writing, in 2023, it is up to about 300 members. I have remained on the WLOV Board as Newsletter Editor. My monthly newsletter, in its seventh year in 2023, now typically runs 15-18 pages (lots of pictures of club activities). The number of writing-related activities open to Villagers has increased dramatically, including arranging to have our self-published books in the local Barnes & Noble bookstore, and a smaller independent bookstore called All Booked Up. Past copies of the newsletter can be found on the club’s website, <https://writersleagueofthevillages.com/index.php/newsletters/>.

In 2021 we had a contest to rename the newsletter, something more eye-catching than “WLOV Newsletter.” A club member came up with a great name.



I enjoyed doing the newsletter – else why do it? One small perk is that every month I can put in a personal picture with my “Message From Your Newsletter Editor.” Sometimes the picture is just my headshot. I often alternate that with a picture of one or more of our grandkids and label it “my assistant editor” (or editors” if more than one). For my last issue as editor, I included a picture of this “editorial team.” (See below)

Of course, not everyone is going to read your club’s newsletter. Some people just don’t bother, no matter how interesting I try to make it, or how many pictures of members I jam in. The non-readers sometimes say they get too many mailings, and they just don’t have time to read everything. And there are always a few who say they never received it – it goes into some unread “spam” or “promotions” folder.

To generate interest, I began adding “trivia” quizzes to the newsletter. The first three readers who send in the correct answers get free publicity for their book in the next edition. One month the quiz spread out titles of eight famous short stories. To win, all you had to do was find them (i.e., skim through the newsletter) and identify the author. Here is the list (answers in the Postscript).

The Cask of Amontillado
The Necklace

An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge
Story of an Hour
The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber
Nightfall
The Lottery
A Good Man is Hard to Find

For another issue, I placed a single quote in the newsletter and wrote in my editor's message:

This month's newsletter trivia contest asks or you to identify a single author, quoted somewhere in this newsletter. When you come across the quote, to enter just send me the author's *full* name (first, middle, last), the year of birth and death, the name of the work that the quote is from *and* the year of first publication.

Here is the quote (answer in Postscript):

I think that I shall never see
A poem as lovely as a tree.

Another month the trivia quiz was an anagram, with bolded letters spread throughout the newsletter. You had to find and unscramble them to name the book title they represent.

W-A-N-D-E-R-M-A-P-A-C-E

Another month I put in five iconic screen shots, and asked readers to identify the movie. Here are two of them.



These trivia contests generated some interest, but not as much as hoped for. Only a few members entered the contest each month, and often it was the same people.

An e-mailed club newsletter is probably not going to be read by most members, or even a majority of those to whom it is sent. If you don't enjoy doing the newsletter, then don't do it. Your lack of enthusiasm will show.

After eight years of putting out the newsletter, I took my own advice, and decided to retire from the job. I had just turned 80, and wanted to devote more time to writing and learning to play music. I made the announcement in October 2023, and stated I would continue through the end of the year. My last issue, December 2023, was one of the best, and I gave special thanks to my editorial team.

In early December, at our last monthly meeting for 2023, I was given a very nice certificate of appreciation, by Rita Boehm, a WLOV board member. Someone else snapped a picture of us, and Rita sent it to the local newspaper.



Christmas week 2023, our three youngest grandkids (on right) and their parents were visiting us in Florida. While sitting around the breakfast table Ruth thumbed through *The Villages Daily Sun*, a thick daily newspaper that focuses on (what else?) The Villages. “Oh look,” she exclaimed, “Here’s grandpa’s picture.” I had no idea it would be published. Rita had sent it in.

I told our 6-year-old, Jacob, that “Grandpa got in the newspaper because “I put your picture in the newsletter.” Of course he believed it.



PostScript

I sold books at our annual Book Expo through 2020. At the January 2020 event, 2500 people attended, to browse among almost 100 vendors. It was by far the most successful WLOV book expo to date. Then Covid hit. By July of 2020 it was clear we could not plan for an event in January 2021. The Villages, like everywhere else, was virtually shut down, all recreation centers closed (the book fair is held in one of them), and the vaccine was still months away. So, the event was scuttled. Villages writers continued to meet on Zoom, however, both my critique group and WLOV.

Would there be a book expo for January 2022? Planning began in summer of 2021, and this one would be a blowout. By November over 100 authors/vendors had signed up, and we had a waiting list. Also, just about everyone had received at least two shots of the Covid vaccine.

But, by early December 2021 the situation didn't look promising, with the CDC predicting a resurgence of cases, and some authors were dropping out. Also, the Expo committee feared people would not show up to a potentially crowded "spreader" event. The committee decided to cancel the event. Fees were refunded. There was disappointment all around.

The book fair resumed on Sunday, January 29, 2023, the largest and most successful ever -- 107 authors spread over three rooms in one of the regional recreation centers. An estimated 3300 people attended. Below is a picture of the ballroom with exhibitor's tables, and a picture of me and Ruth at my table. At the right end of the table is a flyer I distributed of this book's cover, with information about where to read it online.



Now for the trivia quiz answers.

The Cask of Amontillado – Edgar Allen Poe

The Necklace – Guy de Maupassant

An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge – Ambrose Bierce

Story of an Hour – Kate Chopin

The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber – Ernest Hemingway

Nightfall – Isaac Asimov

The Lottery – Shirley Jackson

A Good Man is Hard to Find – Flannery O’Connor

Poet of “Trees” – Alfred Joyce Kilmer, 1886-1918. Poem published August 1913 in “Poetry: A Magazine of Verse”

Anagram book title: War and Peace

Screen shots: “Gone With The Wind”; “Moby Dick”

Consenting Adults Only

After two Civil War novels, I wanted to write something different, a novel about a doctor in modern times. I also wanted to set it in Las Vegas, where just about anything bizarre can happen, and write it in the first person. The result was *Consenting Adults Only*, self-published in 2015.

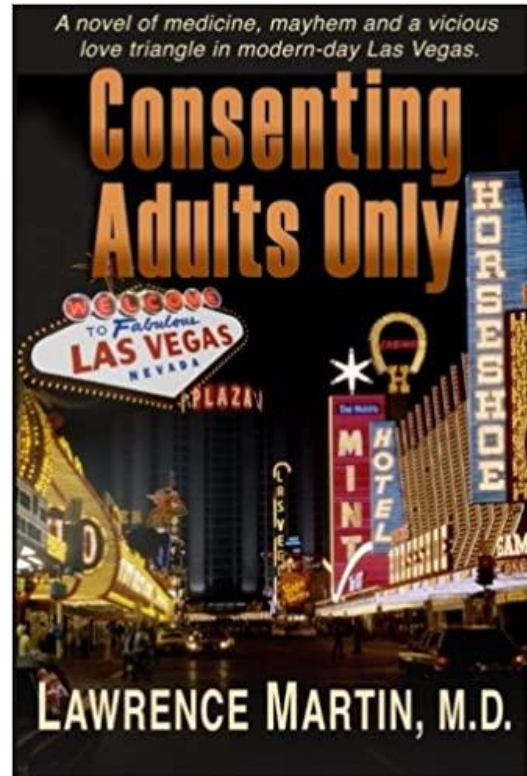
For this book I let my imagination run wild, perhaps too wild. My main character, and the narrator, is Dr. Joshua Luvkin, a young emergency medicine physician. I made him a straight shooter, a normal guy who moves to Las Vegas from Cleveland to work in Memorial Hospital's Emergency Department. He is in the midst of breaking up with a clingy woman doctor, and quickly falls in love with a nurse in his ED, Barbara Wilson. He learns that Barbara also moonlights as a pole dancer, which was her main job before becoming a nurse.

For Las Vegas flavor I invented an illegal betting operation, but went outside any norm, to make it unique: weight reduction contests where the reduction takes place in real time, with each contestant using a normal body function in a private, off-stage bathroom. Dr. Luvkin meets an obese contestant in his ER, and is invited to one of the secret contests, held in a non-descript storefront away from the Las Vegas Strip. He and Barbara go together, their first date.

The novel takes off from there. My backdrop contest plays only a small part of the plot, but the idea of a defecation contest does offend some readers. However, though illegal (in the plot) the contest is cleaner and better run than cockfights, cage match wrestling, or drag racing, none of which (I presume) offends people in the same way. Hypocrisy, I say.

Two aspects of *Consenting Adults Only* differ from my other novels. One is that the main character is a physician and the story includes medical details and scenes, e.g., emergency medicine patients, a malpractice lawsuit, and how hospital administration handles a problematic doctor.

The other difference is the first-person point of view, not used in my other novels (though I do use it in short stories). Here is the book's opening paragraph as told by Dr. Luvkin.



Chapter 1

Believe me, I was not looking for a career change when Jack Strawn came to my Emergency Department. It just happened that way. You could say I was primed for it, by an unconscious desire to do something different than medicine, but that would be untrue. If Strawn had not shown up, I would have stayed happy in my job as a sin-city ED physician. After all, I was saving lives and making a good living. Not even a malpractice lawsuit hanging over my head marred my contentment. I even envisioned retiring in my early 50's.

Dr. Joshua Luvkin is Jewish and nurse Barbara Wilson is Protestant. We soon learn that his previous girlfriend, Judy, is Jewish but somewhat of a nut job.

Joshua is delighted to have a new girlfriend in Barbara, and she moves into his apartment. Their relationship allows for a bit of ethnic humor, which I scatter throughout the novel. In this scene, Barbara tells him his mother called while he was out, and she answered the phone. That is when Joshua's mother first learned he has a new girlfriend.

"Your Mom seemed puzzled about my last name. Twice she asked, 'Did you say Wilson'? And it wasn't a bad connection. Is Wilson a foreign name in your neighborhood?"

"It'll be fine, Barbara," I said. "I've dated non-Jewish girls before. And don't forget, the last one *was* Jewish."

Later I called home. Mom answered. "We talked to your new girlfriend."

"I know Mom, she told me. Very nice, isn't she?"

"She's not Jewish?"

"No, Mom. I broke up with the Jewish one. The one I was dating from LA."

"Oh? That's too bad." It was just the opposite of course, except in the world of Jewish moms.

"You'll like Barbara, I promise."

"So she lives with you?"

"Yes."

"Be careful."

"About what?"

"Just be careful, you know."

The novel's subtitle teases with "a vicious love triangle," which will prove to be an understatement. Josh Luvkin's old girlfriend Judy wants to get married, but he thinks he's done with her. However, the breakup hasn't been formalized, as we'll see. She lives in LA but visits Vegas frequently, and when in town stays with Josh; she still has a key to his apartment.

Meanwhile, Barbara, his new love, has moved in and he is very happy. He plans to call and finalize the break with Judy, but has not done so. A few nights later, Judy unexpectedly shows up from LA – she didn't call – and lets herself in the apartment. He hears her enter, gets out of bed, and goes to the living room, where he sees Judy standing with her suitcase. She expects to be warmly welcomed, but instead he is distant. He gives her a peck on the cheek. At that moment Barbara gets up from their bed, enters the living room and sees Judy standing next to Josh.

"Who's that?" Barbara asked.
I moved back a step. "Barbara, this is Judy."
"Who is Judy?"
Judy stared at this unexpected woman, then at me, then back at Barbara. "Who is Judy? Who is Judy? I'm his wife, honey."
"Oh?"
"Who the hell are you?" asked Judy.
I felt like I was in a sitcom, which was a strange thought because it wasn't so funny. I remember wishing I was a thousand miles away. I turned to Barbara and blurted:
"She is *not* my wife. She's the woman I mentioned to you who I was dating in LA. I mean from LA. She has a key to the apartment, and came in tonight. I didn't know she was coming. That's it. No secrets. It's just unfortunate, uh, timing."
"Not his wife?" rejoined Judy. "Barbara dear, look in the second from the top drawer of his dresser. There you will find panties and bras, if he hasn't thrown them out. Either your boyfriend is a cross dresser or he's living with another woman. Who happens to be me!"
"Judy, why are you telling her we're married?" I couldn't deny we were living together, given the physical evidence, though technically we were not. But the marriage lie was too much. I thought of asking Judy, *if we're married where's your wedding ring?* but decided against it. She might respond that the stone was being re-set, or some other such fabrication. It would become a

he-said-she-said situation, one I could not win at that particular moment.

"Why are you sleeping with a whore?" Judy retorted. Get on her wrong side and Judy can bite. At that moment I had a vision of Glenn Close in *Fatal Attraction*.

Barbara disappeared into the bedroom and returned a minute later with a handful of panties and bras. "Josh, *are* you a cross dresser?"

It was over in five minutes. Barbara dressed and stormed out of the apartment. She would not let me take her home, said she would call a cab. On the way out she had the last word, and it was a doozy: "If you ever divorce the bitch, let me know," and with that slammed the door.

So, first-person narrative, authentic medical scenes, a vicious love triangle, and a bit of ethnic humor. Also, as promised in the subtitle, some mayhem. And, there's a twist at the end, one the reader likely doesn't expect.

Fatal Attraction is not the only historical reference brought to mind by the unfolding plot. It is also remindful of a single line from an obscure 1697 play, *The Mourning Bride*, by William Congreve: "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned."

As per my habit after publishing a book, I did little work on publicity, preferring instead to start writing another one. *Consenting Adults Only* was fun to write, and maybe someday I'll get around to publicizing it on social media. It could even be a movie, a Netflix streaming series. Sex, a vicious love triangle, mayhem, and Las Vegas. Who could ask for anything more?

Don't expect a bestseller if you don't tell the world about your book.

NASA's Etymology Error

Okay, one of my biggest writing mistakes wasn't really NASA's fault, but their terminology in one specific area was (and remains) confusing, so I blame them a little bit. The problem started when I decided to write a picture book for children, about gravity. I don't know why, the subject just interested me, and I thought an illustrated picture book would be a neat way to teach gravity to kids, including my own grandkids. I found a great illustrator on the internet, Rebecca Weisenhoff, and over the course of half a year in 2015 we produced the book, titled *Gravity Is Always With You...Unless You're An Astronaut*. See cover.

I published it using Amazon's Create Space, and it went on Amazon's website. The author, Harry M. Abraham, was me, of course. A writing friend advised I use a pen name because I had just published *Consenting Adults Only*, about a Las Vegas doctor who gets involved in a vicious love triangle (see previous chapter). This friend's thinking was that, as I became known as the author of *CAO*, it would be awkward for me to also publish a kids' picture book. No parent is going to buy this book if they see I also wrote *CAO*. I agreed with his premise.

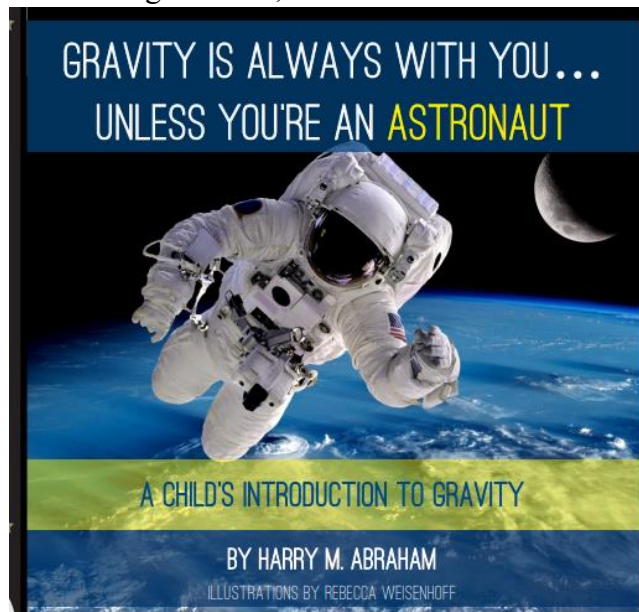
Do you see how delusional authors can be? Assuming success for not just one, but *two* self-published books?

Anyway, using a pen name turned out to be good advice, but not for the reason stated. (By the way, Harry Abraham was my father's first and middle name.)

Because this was a picture book with few words, I did not read it in my critique group. At the time I was also busy with a second Civil War novel, and that was my sole focus in weekly critique club meetings. Big mistake, as you'll see.

As explained in an earlier chapter, Writers League of The Villages sponsors a yearly book fair, for writers from all over, though most exhibitors are residents of The Villages. For a small fee, a writer secures a table to display and sell his or her books. In 2016 I had a table, and prominently laid out my new *Gravity* picture book. A club member, Mark Pryor, walked by, saw the book, and told me he studied in physics in college. As he agreed to do an Amazon review, I readily gave him a copy.

He sent me an email late *that afternoon*. My description of gravity in the book is all wrong, he wrote. I said astronauts are weightless in the International Space Station, because there is



almost no gravity in its orbit, about 250 miles up from Earth. In fact, as is explained all over the internet, there is plenty of gravity at that distance, about 89 percent of Earth's surface gravity!

I called Mark to discuss the error. He was nice about it, said he obviously couldn't give me a good review on Amazon. I thanked him, said I would redo the book.

How did I get it so wrong? Here is one of the pages where I mis-characterize gravity on the ISS.



After speaking with Mark, I did research that should have been done before publication. First, back to the NASA website, where I saw their familiar explanation: "There is microgravity in the International Space Station." Doesn't "micro" mean small, tiny, very little? I interpreted it that way, and thus my explanation above the illustration on page 17.

Note to NASA: the dictionary.com definition of micro is "extremely small." NASA uses the term "microgravity" to signify something totally different than its etymology suggests. Micro certainly does not suggest 89 percent of Earth's gravity!

Then why do astronauts float in the ISS? It's because of balancing forces. As gravity tends to pull down the ISS and everything in it (including the astronauts), the speed of the ship in its orbit counterbalances the gravitational effect. In essence the fall of the station *and* its contents is *continuous*, so the ISS stays in orbit and loose objects inside float. This balanced situation occurs under specific conditions: at a distance of 250 miles above Earth and an ISS speed of 17,500 mph. It's a complicated explanation but my first one, near-zero gravity, was simply not accurate.

When I got Mark's email, the book had been out a few months, and many friends and relatives had seen it, read it to their kids. Several of them actually emailed or called to praise the book. *No one* had pointed out the error before, simply because everyone (well, practically everyone who isn't a physics maven) assumes that ISS astronauts float due to zero gravity.

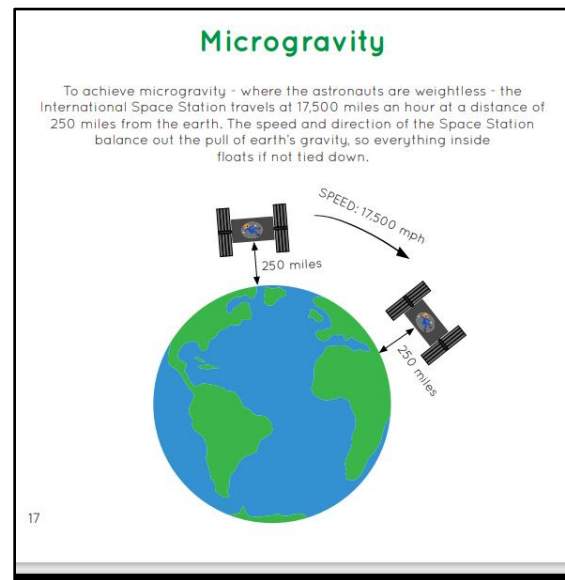
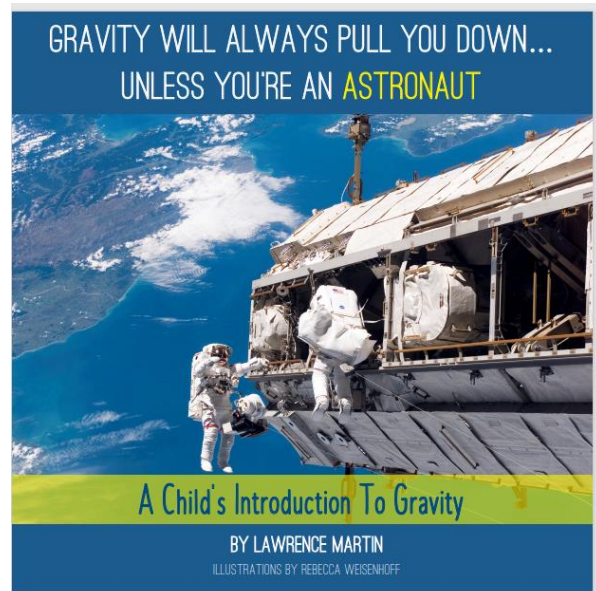
I immediately called Create Space and arranged to have the picture book “delisted.” I was told that would take a few days. One thing I was happy about: using a pseudonym. (I replied to Mark, jokingly, “Who the hell is Harry Abraham anyway?”) As explained earlier, my initial reason for the pseudonym was because of the different intended audience for *Gravity* and *Consenting Adults Only*. Now I saw another reason: if you’re going to screw up an explanation, best to use a pseudonym!

I called Rebecca, arranged for new drawings, and set about rewriting the explanation. And, I fired Harry Abraham.

Here is the revised cover, along with the two new pages.

<https://www.amazon.com/Gravity-Always-Unless-Youre-Astronaut/dp/1945493097/>

Note that I also changed the title since the first one, implying gravity is not “with” the astronauts, was incorrect.



Postscript

While I didn't hesitate to re-do the book, ever since I have been struck by how pervasive the term "zero gravity" is used -- in writing by astronauts! Obviously, they all understand the physics of floating in the ISS, but when writing for the general public they also want to communicate, not obfuscate. "Zero gravity" communicates nicely to a lay audience; explaining a "continual falling toward earth counterbalanced by a speed of 17.5K mph" isn't so intuitive.

Astronaut Scott Kelly, *Endurance*, about his year in the ISS, published 2016.

p. 51: "Our zero g talisman, a stuffed snowman belonging to Gennady's [another astronaut] youngest daughter, floats on a string.

p. 161: "Since it's impossible to re-create the effects of zero gravity in a lab..."

p. 337: "I was in a session with a materials scientist who was teaching a group of astronauts how to use a new piece of equipment on the space station, a furnace for heating materials in zero gravity."

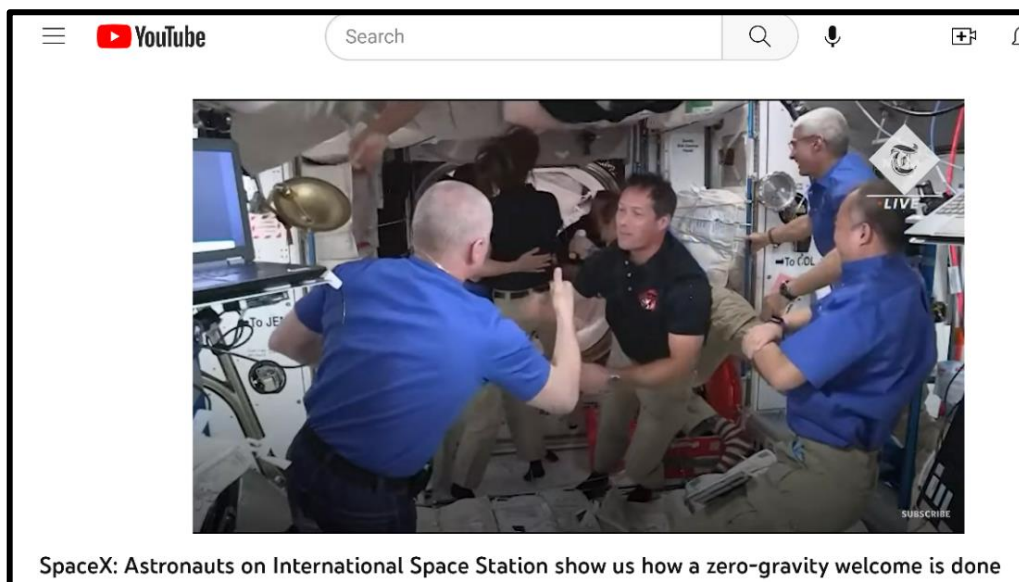
Astronaut Terry Virts, *How to Astronaut*, (pub. 2020) about his training for the ISS.

Title of Chapter 17: "Learning to Float: How to Cope with Zero G" (In the chapter Virts does explain the 'continuous falling-high speed' reason for weightlessness. However, the index entries for this information are listed under "gravity, zero..."

Among many books about space travel written by the Earth-bound is *Packing for Mars*, by journalist Mary Roach, published 2011.

In this book she refers to "zero gravity," "zero-gravity research," and "gravity disappears" in several places, none of which are wholly accurate.

SpaceX YouTube video showing ISS astronauts welcoming a new crew member: "...how a zero-gravity welcome is done."



I could provide more examples of professionals referring to “zero gravity” in the ISS. Still, no justification for my screw-up. Had Mark not read the book, I’d probably still be thinking there is “zero gravity” in the ISS.

**No matter how brief the writing, if it’s for the public always seek feedback.
You often don’t know what you don’t know.**

Research

The summer before our Chicago granddaughter entered eighth grade, I mentioned I was writing a memoir and gave her a few pages to read. Her first comment after reading: “Grandpa, you shouldn’t quote Wikipedia. It’s not reliable.”

“Oh, why not?”

“We’re not allowed to use Wikipedia. It has misinformation.”

“I only use it for sources and basic facts, like dates,” I replied. “It gives me a lot of primary sources which I then can look up and read,”

“Kids sometimes copy stuff from Wikipedia,” she said. “They change it a bit but you can always tell it’s copied.”

I got the impression the misinformation part is being taught to keep students from wallowing in the ancient practice of plagiarism, but I fear the baby is being thrown out with the bathwater, so to speak. Wikipedia has a lot of useful information, and is an invaluable resource for starting one’s research on just about any topic. The trick is to get the right information from as reliable sources as feasible, and not copy someone else’s words without full attribution.

Research pre-internet was far more difficult than now. Encyclopedias like Britannica (Gen Z: a series of big, heavy books with topics in alphabetical order) contained a fraction of the information available on the internet, and finding primary sources required hours of library research. Isaac Asimov, who wrote on almost every topic in the Dewey catalog, mentions his research method in *I, Asimov*. (p. 288):

Once I reached the stage of affluence where I could buy books, I began accumulating [a reference library] ... I now have some 2,000 books divided into sections: mathematics, history of science, chemistry, physics, astronomy, geology, biology literature, and history. I have an Encyclopedia Britannica, an Encyclopedia Americana, a McGraw Hill Encyclopedia of Science and Technology, a complete Oxford English Dictionary, books of quotations, and so on.

Wow! Today, all that information in Asimov’s library is not only likely to be found on the internet, but also frequently updated and cross-referenced. Equally important in research is Amazon. In writing this memoir, I occasionally came across obscure books that contain information I needed. The books were not in the local library, but I was able to order from Amazon and receive them within forty-eight hours! If Asimov had heard of that scenario back in the 1970s, he would probably call it “science fiction.”

So, the Internet (often starting with Wikipedia) and Amazon make research a different ballgame than one or two generations ago.

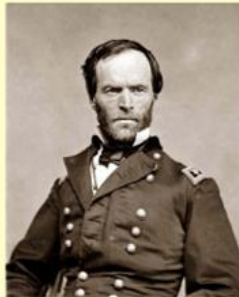
For my three Civil War novels I relied heavily on primary sources, that is, works written either during the Civil War, or by eyewitnesses to events of the period. I became so involved in these sources, which are now plentiful on the internet, that I even created some websites about them. One website covers General Sherman's Memoirs, which came out in four separate editions. I ordered the 1875 edition from Amazon and it came quickly. After further research I created a website on the four editions.

<http://www.lakesidepress.com/ShermanMemoirsEditions.html>

Sherman's Memoirs: the 4 Editions

Q&A about Sherman's Controversial Memoirs

[Civil War Savannah: 1861-1862](#) | [Civil War Savannah: 1863-1865](#) | [Sherman's Famous Telegram to President Lincoln](#) | [Sherman's Mistress in Savannah: A Novel](#) | [Out of Time: An Alternative Outcome to the Civil War](#) | [Sherman's Memoirs: Savannah -- A Play in 2 Acts](#) | [Civil War Fiction](#) | [Sex in the Civil War](#) | [Summary of all Ip.com Civil War web sites](#) | [Return to Lakeside Press](#)



General William T. Sherman (1820-1891) was one of the top three Union Generals during the Civil War (the others were Ulysses S. Grant and Philip Sheridan), and the first general on either side to publish a book-length account of his memoirs. His *Memoirs* was published in spring 1875 and over the years there were three more editions. This web site is about the book itself and the controversy that resulted. The left column provides a bibliography relating to General Sherman and also to the book (includes web sites for complete text of each of the 4 editions).

I also created a website about Sherman's famous telegram after conquering Savannah, in which he offered the city to President Lincoln as a Christmas present

<http://www.lakesidepress.com/Savannah-CivilWar/sherman-telegram.html>

Gen. Sherman's famous telegram to Pres. Lincoln, Dec 1864

[Lawrence Martin](#)

Other Savannah/Civil War links from Lakeside Press: [Civil War Savannah: 1861-1862](#) | [Civil War Savannah: 1863-1865](#) | [Sherman's Mistress in Savannah: A Novel](#) (Click on cover for link to Amazon Kindle) | [Out of Time: An alternative outcome to the Civil War](#) (Click on cover for link to Amazon Kindle) | [Sherman's Memoirs: Savannah - A Play in 2 Acts](#) | [Civil War Fiction](#) | [Sex in the Civil War](#) | [Summary of all Ip.com Civil War web sites](#) | [Return to Lakeside Press](#)

From the internet, I was able to obtain a photocopy of the actual handwritten “telegram,” shown here. Further research showed that it was not a telegram in the old traditional sense, some message sent by wire from point A to point B.

In 1864 there was no reliable telegraph service from Savannah to Washington, D.C. Sherman sent his handwritten message via the steamer *Golden Gate*, moored in the Savannah River, which then traveled to Fortress Monroe, Virginia. From there, the message was wired to the president.

From Sherman’s Memoirs I also learned that the Christmas present was not Sherman’s idea, but the idea of the U.S. Treasury Agent for the Department of the South, one Albert Gallatin Browne. (*Memoirs*, Vol. 2, Savannah and Pocotaligo, page 231).

Before the internet and before Amazon, this type of research would have been far more difficult.

By telegraph from Fort Monroe
Head-Quarters Military Division of the Mississippi
Savannah, Dec 22 1864
To his Excellency,
President Lincoln,
I beg to present you as a
Christmas gift the City of
Savannah with ^{one hundred and fifty} (U.S.A) barrels of flour
and plenty of ammunition, as
also about ^{twenty five thousand} (U.S. Dec) lbs of cotton
W.T. Sherman
Maj Genl.
33 Col
J.P. Moore

My second Civil War novel, *Out of Time: An alternative outcome to the Civil War*, covered two different periods and locations: 1917 Germany and 1864 Georgia. At the end of the book, I included the following section about research for the novel.

References and a Note About the Research

This is a work of fiction that includes a non-fiction Prologue and Appendix, and incorporates many historic figures, locations and battles in the story itself. All the named generals, admirals and forts are historic, as are the political leaders: Kaiser Wilhelm II, Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis of course, but also Mayor Richard Arnold, Secretaries of War John Breckinridge and Edwin Stanton. Knowledge of real battles (date, location, outcome) proves crucial to Germany's Operation Reverse Time. When the historian Goethe learns en route to America that "Gettysburg is way past," knowledge of Sherman's march informs his decision to change the convoy's destination from Virginia to Georgia.

It is fair to say that any author of alternative history first has to learn the history being altered. There are thousands of books and webs sites on the Civil War and it is not hard to find information about any battle or historic figure with just a few key strokes. Wikipedia alone is a treasure trove of information, and an excellent starting point on almost any subject. Google Books has many out-of-print texts on-line for perusal.

I found state-specific web sites also useful, e.g., www.encyclopediavirginia.org/ and www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/. Personal visits to forts in Georgia and Virginia helped increase my understanding of important battles. The following print books were consulted in my research, beginning with the granddaddy of all Civil War references.

The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (128 vols. Washington: 1880-1901). United States War Dept., Washington, D.C. These 128 volumes, known as the Official Records or "OR", were compiled in the 1880 and 1890s. They contain much of the official correspondence and maps extant at the time. Fortunately they are on-line and searchable at several web sites:
<http://ehistory.osu.edu/osu/sources/records/>
<http://e-books.library.cornell.edu/m/moawar//waro.html>
<http://books.google.com/>

In the rest of this note on research I list nineteen other primary sources used for the novel.

For historical fiction, and any other fiction that relies on information that can be fact-checked, try to get the facts straight. Wikipedia is a good place to start, but whenever possible go to the initial sources. And, if you plan to quote something, give full attribution.

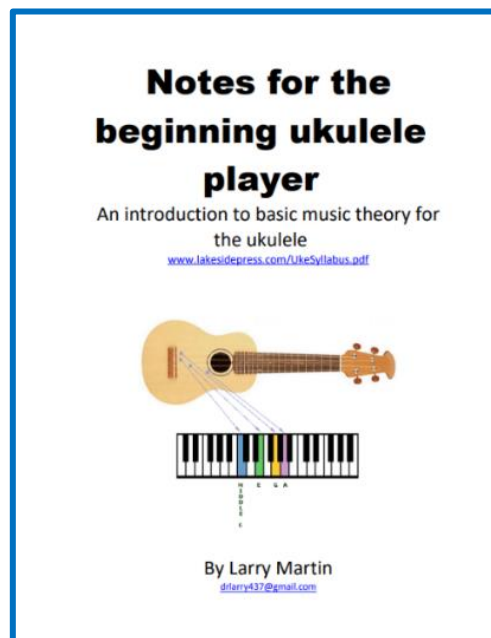
Writing About Music – A Range of Instruments

In retirement, I ended up writing three lengthy, detailed syllabi on basic music theory, and posted them online, in the following order:

June 2016

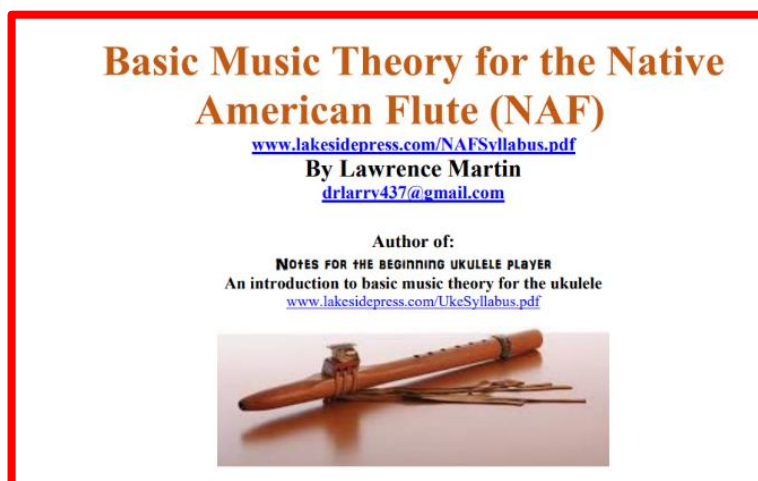
Ukulele -- 139 pages,

<http://www.lakesidepress.com/UkeSyllabus.pdf>



June 2017

Native American Flute -- 44 pages, <http://www.lakesidepress.com/NAFSyllabus.pdf>



April 2019

Piano -- 147 pages, www.lakesidepress.com/PianoSyllabus.pdf



I briefly considered writing a fourth syllabus on the recorder, but since my fling with that instrument was brief, I never wrote it. The three syllabi I did write were all crafted with no formal music education, nor proficiency in any of the instruments. To explain this shift to a whole new interest and writing topic, a little background is necessary.

In Asimov's third autobiography he tells of two regrets growing up: not learning to speak Russian (his parents were from Russia) and not learning to play the piano. I share one of these regrets. Though my mother could play the piano, we had no piano in the house and growing up I had virtually no exposure to music. Our economic situation didn't allow for the instrument or for lessons. Not that I asked for them, either.

Also, I could not sing. Once, in the third grade, a teacher asked me not to sing in a group session (I'm not making this up).

To belabor the point, as a child and throughout high school, I was musically ignorant. Yet I always had the urge to learn about music, despite my lack of exposure. When we moved to San Antonio in 1971 for my Air Force stint, a mall store offered piano lessons with the option to stop in the store anytime and practice. Since we didn't own a piano at the time, this seemed like an ideal arrangement, and I signed up. Within two weeks, the store closed. This was before the era

of cheap electric keyboards, and I wasn't motivated enough to buy an upright and seek out private lessons, though I had plenty of time those two years. Foolish me.

After Ruth and I returned to New York in 1973, for our continued medical training, we acquired our first piano. Ruth's parents had an old upright and we arranged to have it moved from Stratford CT, where they lived, to our condo in Yonkers. At that point, I decided to start weekly piano lessons with a private teacher. However, my call schedule as a medical resident soon made practice difficult if not impossible, and I gave it up *after just two months*.

Three years passed, and we moved to Cleveland in 1976, for my pulmonary job at Mt. Sinai Hospital. We soon traded in the old upright for a baby grand Knabe. When the kids came of age (roughly seven or eight) we started each of them on piano lessons. The piano was there for me to use as well... and I didn't. No lessons, no study of music. I was super busy in my career, which also involved writing medical books. No time (or will) to pivot into learning piano.

Ruth had played both piano and bassoon in high school. Her bassoon playing was good enough for her to fill in when needed in Stratford's Shakespeare Theater orchestra, and also to play for the University of Connecticut orchestra. But she gave up the bassoon in medical school. After our move to Cleveland, she did not continue with any instrument.

Decades passed. Near retirement, we took the opportunity to attend live music, abundant in Northeast Ohio: not just classical, but also Broadway, folk, and Zydeco. We particularly liked Apollo's Fire (AF), a world-renown baroque ensemble that originated in Cleveland. At an AF concert in early 2014, Ruth became enamored of the hammered dulcimer sound and decided she wanted to learn to play the instrument. At intermission, she approached the HD musician – Tina Bergmann – and expressed interest in lessons. After an exchange of emails, Tina agreed to take on Ruth as a student. Tina lives in Kent, Ohio, about a 45-minute drive from our home at the time.

The first step was to secure an instrument. Tina suggested Ruth initially rent one, and met us on a cold March Saturday at Woodsy's Music, a venerable music store in Kent. There, with Tina's help, Ruth found a suitable HD and arranged to rent it for three months, which would give her time to learn which size and model to buy. Here I must digress to explain that there are two types of dulcimers: "mountain" (left) and "hammered" (right).





They are both called dulcimers because they have a sweet sound; the name comes from Greek words *dulce* and *melos*, which combine to mean “sweet tune.” Otherwise, they have nothing in common, though they do sound good when played together in group sessions. The mountain dulcimer (MD) has three strings and is played with a pick or your fingertips. The hammered dulcimer (HD) has multiple strings that are hit with thin wooden hammers. The MD dates from 19th-century Appalachian musicians. The HD goes back centuries and is mentioned in the Bible.

Because they both carry the same moniker, festivals, magazines, and clubs that feature “dulcimer” usually include both instruments. If the MD had been named the “mountain guitar,” “Appalachian fiddle,” or anything else, I doubt the two instruments would be lumped together as often as they are now. So, when you hear the term “dulcimer,” always ask “which one?” By the way, the MD is much easier to play and is therefore far more common in music groups than the HD. It’s also much lighter and cheaper. Ruth wanted to learn the HD.

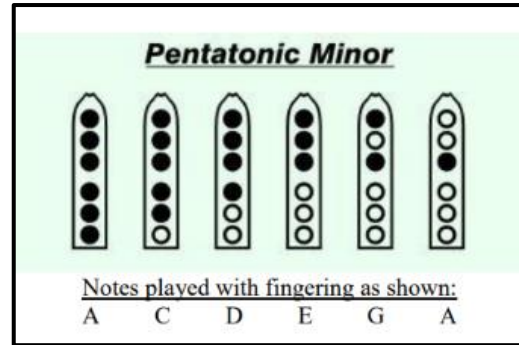
Back to Woodsy’s. While Ruth and Tina tried out various HDs, I wandered around the store and came upon a display of Native American flutes, as shown in the picture. I was able to try one out using a disposable mouthpiece and found I could play the notes! If I wanted to take up music, why not start with the Native American flute (NAF)?



Over the next two weeks I did some shopping on the internet and decided on a Sparrow Hawk NAF in the key of A, from High Spirits Flutes. The flute arrived but I didn’t touch it for two months. I was busy writing. Meanwhile, Ruth continued weekly lessons with Tina, and in late spring ordered a Dusty Strings HD through the Woodsy store.

At one of Ruth's lessons Tina told her of an upcoming folk music festival in Coshocton, Ohio, a two-hour drive south of Cleveland. These folk festivals, a combination of teaching sessions and performances, are held all over the country, but we had never been to one. The weekend festival schedule showed a focus on both types of dulcimer, plus ukulele and guitar, and one session on the Native American flute. It looked inviting and we signed up. Ruth could take hammered dulcimer classes, and I could do the NAF session, plus listen in other classes and attend all the jam sessions.

Now motivated, I unwrapped my new NAF and started to play it using tablature, a way to play many instruments without having to read musical notation. In NAF tablature, each note is represented by a picture of the holes you cover with your fingertips. The Pentatonic Minor diagram shows the notes played on my flute when specific holes are covered. I could play this 5-note scale plus a few simple melodies presented in a tablature song book.



In June 2014 we traveled to the Coshocton festival. It was held in historic Roscoe Village, a quaint section of Coshocton that hosts a variety of festivals throughout the year. The NAF class was taught by Bing Futch, an amazing musician (NAF, mountain dulcimer, ukulele) and a great teacher. It was the only session I enrolled as a student. The rest of the time I roamed the festival, sat in on other sessions (including a couple of Ruth's), and attended jam sessions and mini-concerts.

The festival experience was transformative. Like my epiphany after visiting Savannah's Green-Meldrim house in 2011, I was blown away. My God, this is music! Look how much fun these people have playing together, in jam sessions. I so much wanted to be part of this culture. But how? I needed more than the NAF, something I could play along in a group.

The obvious answer: ukulele, a four-string instrument that can be played with simple strumming (see photo). Once you know a few chords you can play along with others.

Ruth decided to take up the uke also, as a second instrument to the HD. Back home, we ordered ukuleles from Amazon and the rest of the year took a few lessons.

Intrigued by the NAF, I also looked into recorders. The recorder is another baroque instrument, often played in Apollo's Fire concerts. It has a different sound than the NAF, and as long as I was embarking on a musical journey, why not try it out? A month after the Coshocton festival, I ordered a Yamaha recorder from Amazon, plus an instruction book (see photo, next page). The recorder I ordered seemed to be the right size for me. That it was an "alto" recorder in the key of F did not register at the time.



Anyone with a musical background is likely thinking: “This seventy-year-old doctor, with no musical background, is now into uke, NAF, and recorder? What a joke!”

I don’t dispute that impression. However, I saw retirement looming, and knew it was now or never if I wanted to learn anything about music. (It could have been worse. One of the instruments being peddled at Coshocton for beginners was the psaltery, a triangular-shaped stringed instrument you play with a bow. I decided the uke was simpler and had a better sound.)

I also started experimenting with our piano, banging out some of the notes in the books I now had for the ukulele, recorder, and NAF. In mid-July 2014, I wrote in my journal:

I realize I am going overboard on this thing. Saturday I spent some time on the piano, banging out the notes to Simple Gifts. I practiced the flute. I plan to practice the Uke. I ordered a recorder today. I am learning to understand music, though it would be not true to state I am learning to “read” music. Musicians have put in the requisite 10,000 hours, and started young. I have put in maybe 20 hours and started at age 70. This is for personal enjoyment only. My goal? Perhaps one day be able to ‘jam’ with people. Or play the NAF without looking at finger tablature. Really, just to have fun. Sad to say, but it’s part of my life that’s been missing. For 40 years I’ve been writing books and for 20 years creating web sites and playing golf. I don’t regret the golf, but wish in all those years I had spent time learning music. I did try piano lessons when we were in Yonkers, but the pressure of pulmonary fellowship ended that endeavor. In truth, I didn’t try enough. I was not obsessed and it was simply not a priority. Then I put my all into the Mt. Sinai job: the teaching, the books, the medical web sites.



Writing About Music – Path to the Uke Syllabus

Although I struggled with every instrument in my burgeoning arsenal, I developed a keen interest in basic music theory -- the scales and intervals played, how chords make up the harmony and fit with the melody. I studied a lot of books and websites and began writing down information and making lists, in order to explain things to myself. Over time I came to a startling observation.

Most musicians who write about music theory don't have a good grasp of what beginners don't know...so their explanations are often inadequate, poorly worded, and/or confusing.

You can argue with “most” and “often,” but that was my experience as I explored relevant books and websites. This observation led me to realize *I can do better*. Yes, that's right. I, a nothing, non-musician could explain basic music theory for these instruments better than most musician writers, for one simple reason. I have a sense of what beginners don't know, and once I learn about the subject, know how to explain it.

Music theory is not more complicated than pulmonary physiology. If I can explain blood gases to medical students, it's because I know what the students don't know, and how to get across the important information.

For a potentially difficult subject like physiology or music theory, it helps to incorporate four elements in any written explanation: appreciation of what novices don't know; clear, unambiguous writing; repetition; feedback.

I found these elements lacking in almost everything I read on basic music theory, and their lack caused me great confusion on several occasions. Here I will present one example of this situation, with more to come in other chapters on my musical journey.

I did not pay attention to the key of the recorder I ordered from Amazon., The book I ordered with it, Hal Leonard's *Play Recorder Today!* is for recorders in the key of C and I assumed that was the recorder I had ordered. For example, with all the holes closed the book said I was playing a D. And I could recognize a D on the treble clef, just above the middle C. The tunes I played sounded right, so I didn't question the key of my recorder. Then, I had a comeuppance, as it were. Here is what I wrote on August 30, 2014.

I did a short jam with Ruth last night, me playing Amazing Grace on recorder and Ruth doing the chords on the dulcimer. I told her the music I was using was in C, since my recorder is in C, but she said it didn't sound right. She was correct. I went back to Amazon, and found out the recorder I ordered was an alto recorder in F, not C. I was simply mistaken in thinking I had a C recorder. All alto recorders are F. The sopranos are in C. Then I went back to the two instruction books I bought, and note that neither one states the music is for C recorders, but it is. All the written notes assume you have a C recorder, but nowhere is this stated. When I put the Snark [tuner] on my recorder, there it is: low note is F, not C. This means that all the fingering I have learned for Simple Gifts and Amazing Grace is really for the C recorder, not the one I am playing! It still sounds right because the intervals are the same, but doesn't sound right when playing with another person who is playing in C. Last night I ordered another recorder, a soprano in C.

So, I had been fingering notes on my F recorder but *not* playing notes in the key of F; instead, they were in the key of C. The tunes still sounded okay, because the intervals were the same. But if I was ever to try to play the recorder with other players, I would be all messed up. Rather than relearning all the finger patterns, I went ahead and ordered a soprano recorder in the key of C, and practiced with that one.

Any musician reading this is probably laughing out loud at my ignorance. But that's the point. I *was* ignorant; the Hal Leonard book should state on its Amazon site that the book is only for "C" recorders, otherwise known as "soprano" recorders. Or, it should have stated this on the book's cover or in the written Introduction. *Nada*.

Music instruction confusion did not end there. I would also encounter confusion relating to the piano, on the subjects of four-note seventh chords and musical modes. Larry to the rescue: I would clear up the confusion!

2015

We formally retired from our medical jobs December 31, 2014 and drove to a rental home in The Villages, Florida. Within a few days after arrival, we contacted a real estate agent and for two weeks viewed several homes for sale in our price range. They were all similar in size and design – three bedroom, two baths – but we didn't like their location; they backed too closely to another house or to a busy street.

One day in mid-January our agent called and said another home was just coming on the market. It backed to one of The Villages' large retention ponds, and would be formally listed that afternoon. We met her at the house, and found it had just what we wanted: backyard privacy, with a large pond behind the house. The home was less than a year old. The occupants had only lived in it for about eight months, when they decided to move to a larger home. We agreed to buy it just hours before the formal listing, for \$440,000.

One unexpected plus of moving to this part of Florida was the Mt. Dora dulcimer festival, held each February. Mt. Dora is a cutesy town 45 minutes from The Villages. The “Mount” comes from the fact that the elevation is 184 feet above sea level.

The festival was similar to the Coshocton festival, in that it concentrated on both types of dulcimer, but also offered sessions on other instruments, including ukulele and penny whistle. I signed up for the ukulele classes. We attended this festival every February, 2015-2019. Covid canceled it for the next two years, and then it moved out of Mt. Dora.

We closed on our new home in April 2015, then returned to Ohio to sell our Highland Heights house and prepare for our permanent move to Florida in September. Cleveland and its suburbs have always been a bear market for housing, due to the region’s declining population and extraordinarily high property taxes (among the highest in the nation). Despite having a great, modern home on a golf course in an upscale community, and pricing the house at 100K less than we spent for it in 2006, we had *no offers*. By August we decided our best option was to rent it out, and found suitable tenants who would become renters for the next four years.

Meanwhile, for that summer of 2015, Ruth resumed dulcimer lessons with Tina, and we both took ukulele lessons. I practiced the NAF desultorily and still did nothing about learning to play the piano. But it was on my mind.

We drove to Florida in late September, arriving a few days ahead of our moving van. After two nights in a hotel, our furniture arrived and we moved in. Our Florida home is considerably smaller than what we had in Highland Heights: no basement or second floor, but ideal for retirees: no stairs. Since it does not have room for our baby grand piano, we arranged to send it to our middle daughter in New York. The shipping cost from Ohio (@\$1500) was three times what we could have sold it for.

As soon as we settled in, I began to search for an electric piano, one that would fit comfortably in our living room. Phone and online investigation (Sam Ash Music in Orlando, a local music store in Ocala, Kraft Music and Amazon online) led me to the Yamaha DX650 as the best option, which I ultimately purchased from Amazon (photo).



Then I signed up for Piano 101, a group lessons course offered in The Villages’ Life Long Learning program. It was taught by the husband-and-wife team of Bill and Patti Thompson, who lived in TV and used to teach piano in south Florida. I knew group lessons would not be the ideal way to learn piano, but it was a good beginning for me. In addition to the music they distributed, I ordered *Alfred’s Self-Teaching Adult Piano Course* book and practiced from it almost every day.

Visitors often state The Villages is like Disney World for retirees in part because, like a giant amusement park, there are so many choices when you enter the gate. In our case the choices revolved around which clubs to join – so many looked interesting. We settled on three clubs where we could play the ukulele. In addition, Ruth joined a dulcimer club and I joined two writing clubs. We were busy!

So, by the fall of 2015, I was into both piano and ukulele, each at a beginner level. I also messed a little with the recorder and the Native American flute. At this point I am a raging dilettante, just beginning to learn music theory, and struggling to make up for lost decades.

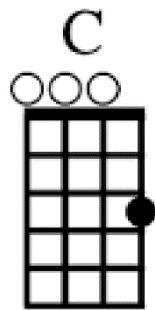
2016

One day in January 2016, we were practicing the uke at home and Ruth asked me how to use the capo on the instrument. All I knew was that the capo, when applied to fret, presses all the strings on that fret and converts the notes played without the capo into another key (see photo). The capo is very common among guitar players, since the guitar has a large fret board, but is rarely used in uke groups, and then only by accomplished uke players.

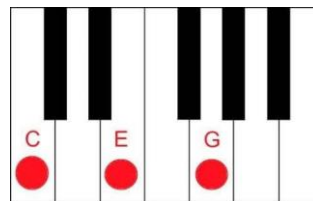


I figured learning *about* the capo could enhance my understanding of the notes played on each string, so I delved into finding a good explanation. All the websites and videos I checked were confusing. I emailed the popular website Ukulele Underground and got a response, but it was not fully explanatory. So – naturally! – I began writing my own explanation. This became my first written chapter for what would evolve into a 100+ page syllabus, “Notes for the Beginning Ukulele Player.”

In writing the syllabus I found the best way to understand chords played on the uke was in reference to the keyboard. On the keyboard, notes strummed on the four uke strings (G-C-E-A) are easily visualized, so I included keyboard figures with information on ukulele chords. For example, here is the C chord on the Uke and on the piano. On the uke the notes played by strumming all 4 strings, with the 4th one pressed down as shown by the black circle, are G-C-E-A. The C-major chord on the piano is C-E-G. So the notes are the same. By showing keyboard diagrams alongside Uke diagrams, the chords are more easily visualized.



G-C-E-A



By the end of June, the syllabus was complete enough to post on the internet; it went online June 27, 2016, and has since been revised several times. Below is the link; the Preface to the Uke Syllabus is in [Appendix E](#).

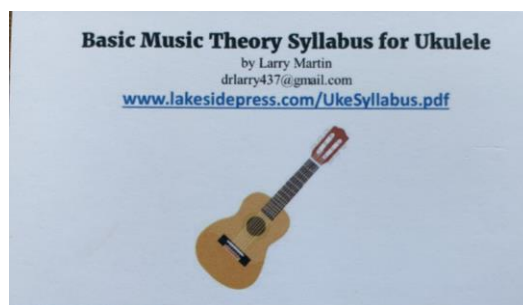
<http://www.lakesidepress.com/UkeSyllabus.pdf>

Writing About Music – Syllabus for the Native American Flute

2017

By early 2017 I was into three instruments; piano, ukulele, Native American flute. In January I started private piano lessons with Bill Thompson, who (along with his wife Patti) also ran the group lessons; private lessons were much more helpful.

I was also attending at least two club sessions a week. If, in conversation, I detected a modicum of interest about my uke syllabus from fellow players, I gave out a card printed with the syllabus title and web link.



As for the Native American flute, I continued to practice the instrument and study books using tablature. I also joined a local flute circle, a small NAF group that met on occasion in one of the Villages' rec centers.

Sure enough, in my reading I soon became confused about some aspect of the NAF. Using a tuner attached to my NAF, I found that the notes indicated on the tablature page were *not* the notes I was playing. I soon uncovered the reason and began writing the explanation. One thing led to another and by the end of May I had created my second syllabus on basic music theory – this one for the NAF. <http://www.lakesidepress.com/NAFSyllabus.pdf>. Regarding this syllabus, below are journal entries for May 2017.

May 13, 2017

Much of the weekend spent writing my NAF music theory syllabus. It's like the uke syllabus, I start and keep going until I get it right. Am about 90% done. Now working on NAF tablature section. I learn by doing this. No one will read the thing – it is far too detailed and pedantic, though it does an excellent job (if I may say so) of explaining basic music theory for the NAF. I'll post it online, send it to Clint Goss, Scott August, and some other [NAF] gurus.

May 17, 2017

Past two days have worked more hours on NAF Syllabus. After I go over it with Ruth, hopefully sitting at the keyboard, with flutes in hand, I'll send it to Flutopedia (Clint Goss) and Scott August, asking permission to use their material, and also as a way to let them know about the syllabus. I also signed up on two large Face-book NAF sites, and will post it there.

May 20, 2017

More non-stop work on NAF syllabus, hours yesterday and at least another hour this morning. Ruth went over Step 9 again yesterday, after my considerable revision, and I made some more

changes this morning in Section 11. The syllabus is finished, but I will sit on it a day or two before sending it out to Clint Goss and Scott August, and members of the flute circle.

May 24, 2017

NAF Syllabus – effectively finished; waiting to hear from some Face-book reviewers, and on permission for use of figures from Clint Goss and Scott August.

I got the permissions needed, and for my Journal entry June 4, 2017 wrote:

...finished my rewrite of Step 12, and posted the revised syllabus online.

The Introduction to the NAF syllabus, in Appendix E, explains my path to writing it.

Who Cares?

The two music theory syllabi served their purpose – to help me learn basic music theory. But I was hyperaware that most people in my position, i.e., retirees playing or taking up an instrument, don't care about music theory. They just want to play music, not study theory. I'm okay with that. Some of the best folk musicians don't even read music. I began to joke about my efforts: "Those who can, play music; those who can't, write about it."

In November 2017 I traveled alone to Melbourne, Florida for a weekend seminar on the Native American flute. It was given by Clint Goss, famous for his massive online Flutopedia, basically everything NAF, which I used as a resource for my syllabus. His wife Vera also plays the NAF, and for two days they gave earnest instruction on the instrument. In my journal entry for that first day, I expressed dismay over the sessions.

Journal entry, November 7, 2017

First 3 hours of flute workshop this morning were somewhat of a disappointment. Goss is a true expert in the NAF, with his Flutopedia, and knows everything there is to know, but he runs the workshop like a Yoga/meditation guru, with only occasional teaching how to play the flute. It's much more "feel the rhythm", "express yourself" and very little teaching or insight. I think about 20 minutes was worthwhile from my perspective – when he gave out the scales sheet.

Three hours this afternoon were no better. It's all playing random notes. During the ABA exercise I flubbed the notes, and felt embarrassed, trying to play Amazing Grace with some improv in the middle. A disaster, but people were nice.

In looking back, I think the difficulty I experienced arose from my lack of playing ability. I was looking for didactic instruction, and they were offering more "feel the music," that would be appropriate for someone who could find the notes in a timely fashion. I couldn't, so was disappointed. After this trip, I more or less gave up further study of the NAF, and concentrated on piano and ukulele.

Writing About Music – The Piano Syllabus

The piano is the only instrument that I have pursued in any depth, with private lessons and almost daily practice. However, I fully realize that, no matter how much I practice, I will never be able to play musically. The reason is straightforward: no innate musical talent, and I didn't start until after age seventy.

The aged brain cannot process the necessary information like a child. Skill sets that come easy as a child are notoriously difficult to learn as we age. Language is the best example; we learn to speak before starting school. Learning a new language as an adult is an effort. As for music, virtually all professional musicians started learning their instrument before adulthood, and the earlier the better.

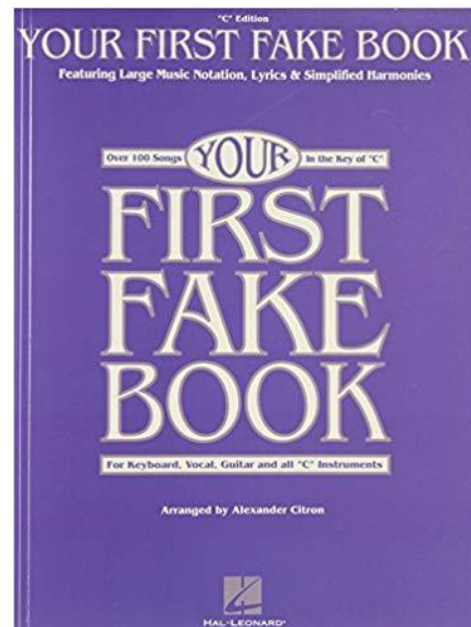
The same is true for professional golfers, as I point out in my chapter on golf. So, I have no illusions about learning to play music with any facility. However, writing about music has helped me understand what I cannot do proficiently.

I knew the limitations and decided to pursue piano anyway. I was aware of two basic approaches to teaching piano to beginning adults. One is the 'classical' method, which teaches how to play both treble and bass clefs. This is the standard approach used to teach children, and it provides the most flexibility. Within this approach are several "method books," such as Bastien, Faber, and Alfred; they all teach the student to read and play both clefs.

The other approach uses lead sheets, which have just the treble clef, plus the harmony – three- or four-note chords – written above the treble clef. Lead sheets are favored by adults who just want to play popular songs, and not spend precious time learning the bass clef.

A collection of lead sheets in book form has long been known as a "fake book," because experienced players could "fake" the complex harmony of the bass clef by just learning a series of chords.

The lead sheet approach has been popularized by Scott Houston, who produced shows about the method on PBS, and sells his books and course materials on the internet. Houston also has over 100 YouTube videos (search for "Scott Houston piano guy"). The idea is that if you learn a bunch of chords with your left hand you can do away with the bass clef, so this is a shortcut compared to the classical teaching method.



Below left is sheet music showing the treble and bass clefs, with some chords written above the treble clef. In this piece of music, the bass clef notes aren't all that difficult, but do require ability to read that clef. The same music without the bass clef is a lead sheet, shown below right.

Beauty And The Beast
from Walt Disney's BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

Lyrics by Howard Ashman
Music by Alan Menken

Moderately

f Tale as old as time, true as it can
be. Base-ly ev-en friends, then some-bo-dy
bends un-ex-pect-ed-ly.
Just a lit-tle change. Small, to say the

Chords: F, C7sus4, C7, F, C7sus4, C7, F, Am, Bb, C7sus4, F, C7sus4, C7, F

Preview at www.musicaneo.com

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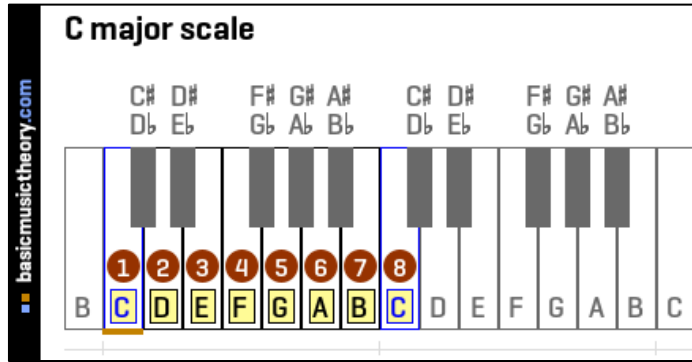
Preview at www.musicaneo.com

I decided from the beginning to learn the classical method, and along the way to also study chords and lead sheets. This process initially started out in group lessons offered in The Villages. I used them to learn some basics, but with twenty people in the room, there was no individual feedback. Still, it introduced me to the keyboard and some basic method books, all geared to learning treble and bass clefs.

After a year of these group sessions, I started weekly private lessons and delved deeper into music theory. By mid-2017 I had already written two syllabi on basic music theory, for the ukulele and Native American flute. It was time to write one for the piano.

For my piano syllabus I decided to take a narrow approach, and emphasize music theory using the concept of half steps and whole steps. Thus, I titled my syllabus “Basic Music Theory for Adult Beginner-Level Piano Players,” subtitled “With emphasis on half steps and whole steps.”

For readers who unfamiliar with the keyboard, half steps are the intervals between any two adjacent keys; whole steps are the intervals between any two keys when they are separated by a key between them.



In the piano keyboard above, C to D is a whole step, as is C# to D# and E to F#. C to C# is a half-step, as is E to F and B to C. I found this concept the best way to learn what I considered basic music theory.

Unlike the first two music syllabi, the piano one took almost two years to complete, and wasn't posted until April 2019. It went through frequent revisions and I sought feedback from half a dozen people, who I acknowledge in the syllabus. I kept adding appendices, for information not really "basic music theory," but that I considered important.

In [Appendix E](#) is my Introduction to the piano syllabus, with an explanation of how I, a no-nothing non-musician, came to write the thing.

I also made a business card for this syllabus, shown here. I give it out whenever the opportunity arises, usually to fellow beginning students who I may encounter.

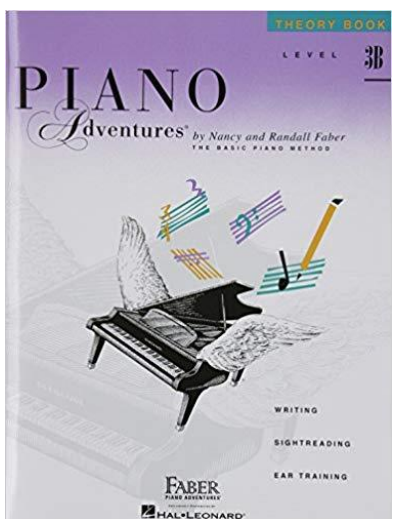


Writing About Music – Confusion on Theory

My three music syllabi were in part inspired by all the confusion I came across in studying basic music theory. On April 18, 2016, I wrote:

Recently I have figured out three things in music that are each VERY POORLY EXPLAINED in everything I've read. Answers to these questions may be obvious to musicians, but beginners like me are only befuddled by the incredibly poor explanations offered on websites and in books. Examples I came across:

- How to use a capo on the ukulele
- Explanation of musical modes (as opposed to scales)
- Why are soprano and tenor recorders tuned “the same” whereas the alto recorder is tuned differently
- Music instruction book for recorders that never states it’s for C recorders only.



In October 2018 I ran into some confusion in Theory Book 3B, from the Faber series, which I will explain.

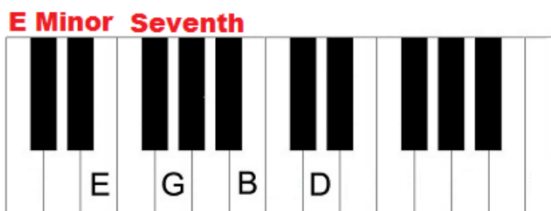
Whoa! If you're not into piano music or music theory, skip this. I am presenting it for the record, to buttress my point about poor explanations to novices. So, here goes.

Faber is well regarded and recommended by many piano teachers. However, in Faber's 3B Theory book, page 3 shows three common chords for the scale of A minor, and that's where I got confused.

Below is the A-minor scale. Notice it has no sharps (#), which would be the black keys on the piano.

A-B-C-D-E-F-G

A common chord from this scale is the so-called E minor seventh, which has four notes from this scale, starting with the E.



The E minor seventh chord is abbreviated v7, because it *starts* on the 5th letter of the A minor scale, E, and goes up 7 notes (counting E as 1) to the D. The small v stands for the fact that the fifth note is from a *minor* scale. When actually played, the third note, B, is often omitted, so the chord “v7 of the A minor scale” is typically played E-G-D.

v7 chord of A minor scale: E-G-D

Clear enough. However, the Faber book shows this fifth chord in the “A minor scale” section as containing a sharp. It is labeled V7 (capital “V”) and played as follows:

E-G#-D

This confused me. Why is Faber showing a G# when there are no sharp notes in the A minor scale? Now, if you are into music, or play the piano, you are no doubt thinking what an idiot I am. You understand exactly what is going on.

In a nutshell, there are two “A minor” scales, and the letter sequence without the sharp is the “natural” A minor scale. The other A minor scale is called the “harmonic” A minor, and it does have a G# note. (There is actually a third A minor scale, but it’s not germane to this discussion.) Here is the *harmonic* A minor scale:

A-B-C-D-E-F-G#

So, I was befuddled. I went to basicmusictheory.com to check on the v7 chord for A minor, and only then did I realize that the above 7th chord in Faber – written as V7 – is from the “harmonic” A minor scale, and not from the “natural” A minor scale. The two chords — v7 for A *natural* minor and V7 for A *harmonic* minor — are shown below.

The roman numeral for number 5 is 'v', and is used to indicate this is the 5th chord in the scale. It is in **lower** case to denote that the chord is a *minor* chord.

A minor 7th chord 5 is E minor 7th

Chord names for A minor chord 5

The roman numeral for number 5 is 'V', and is used to indicate this is the 5th chord in the scale. Just like a major chord, the dominant 7th chord is constructed using a *major* third interval, so the roman numeral is shown in **upper** case.

A harmonic minor 7th chord 5 is E dominant 7th

Turns out that the common practice when playing chords from the *natural* A minor scale is to “borrow” the V7 from the *harmonic* A minor scale.

Common practice, so should be obvious, right? Yes, if you are musician, or piano teacher. But not obvious to me, a novice reading the Faber book without a teacher nearby. While the explanation is known to music teachers, the Faber Theory book didn’t say “ask your teacher if you don’t understand this.” It just assumes you know the reason.

I found the same minor scale chord assumptions in other sections of the Faber series, which I won’t bore you with. Annoyed, I wrote to the publisher, via email.

To Faber:

As currently presented in Faber 3B (both the Theory book and also the Lesson book on pages 7, 15 and 23), the headings can cause confusion for novices and beginning players. While musicians and experienced players may immediately recognize the chords presented are for the harmonic minor scale, they are not your audience for these books. Like myself, your audience is more likely beginners and people just learning music theory. As I understand it, **the convention is that when the adjectives “harmonic” and “melodic” are omitted for minor scales, the reference is always to the natural minor scale.** Thus, the headings in Theory 3B should really read: Harmonize in A Harmonic Minor and Harmonize in E Harmonic Minor. And in the Lesson 3B book, Primary Chords in A Harmonic Minor, etc.

Larry Martin

I got a prompt reply from Faber’s “Director of Productions and Technology.” Unfortunately, his email reply was a mini-lecture on the difference between the minor and harmonic scales, and did not address my complaint about the language confusion in the Theory 3B book. I then sent the following reply,

To Faber:

Thanks for your prompt response. Unfortunately – and I say this with utmost respect, as I know you must be an experienced musician – you’ve completely misinterpreted my email. My email is NOT about music theory, NOT about the differences between natural and harmonic minor. Though an admitted novice, I understand that well enough.

My email is simply about language and communication to the reader. It is about writing clearly and consistently. The error is in Faber’s inconsistent use of terms when referring to the harmonic minor scale. On some pages Faber inserts “harmonic” to describe the harmonic scale. On other pages it omits “harmonic” when describing the harmonic scale or chords from the scale. Since the convention is to omit “harmonic” only when referring to the natural minor scale, I initially became confused when I saw chords from the A minor and E minor scale with a sharp that was not part of either natural minor scale. It took me awhile to realize the book is referring to the harmonic minor scale in these instances, and not the natural minor scale. This inconsistent usage is present throughout the 3B

books. Would it be so wrong to label every reference to harmonic scale with the term “harmonic”? I simply don’t understand why consistent terminology is not used, when it would obviate initial confusion.

So please go back and reread my emails. They are NOT about music theory, NOT about the differences among minor scales, but about clarity of writing in books aimed at novices and beginning players.

Larry Martin

I never heard back from Faber. I may be the only nerd to ever question the issue, and no doubt they saw no need to fix things. But the point is solid. If you’re going to publish for beginners, explain anything that can be confusing. A simple sentence would have obviated this confusion, e.g., “Composers who write in the natural minor scale routinely pull the seventh chord from the harmonic minor scale, even though that chord is not part of the natural minor scale; hence, in this book, we use the harmonic minor 7th chord in place of the natural minor 7th chord.”

An Even Worse Case

The ultimate of all musical theory confusion I came across was on the subject of musical “modes.” Practically everything written about them I found to be either overly complex, or so simplistic that nothing is really explained. The Wikipedia entry on modes dealt mostly with arcane historical aspects, and only at the end did it get to “Modern Western Modes,” with a less than adequate explanation.

Many websites – including YouTube videos on the subject – fail to clarify the differences and similarities among terms like “modes,” “scales,” “minor scale,” “major scale,” etc. Instead, these terms are thrown out willy-nilly, without clear explanation.

Here is an analogy. Suppose you know nothing about types of automobiles, and then read this sentence in an article purporting to explain the different types. “Most people drive sedans or SUVs, but on the highway you’ll also find cars.” Huh? Aren’t sedans and SUVs cars? That piece of gobbledegook resembles a lot of writing about musical modes: confusion of terms like “scales” and “modes,” and unclear definitions.

Okay, this rant can be viewed as another example of “Who Cares?” Likely not the target audience for my syllabus, “Basic Music Theory for Adult Beginner-Level Piano Players.” But I cared. I really wanted to understand the differences between “modes” and “scales,” and the best way for me was to write a clear explanation. Because musical modes is not really “basic” music theory, I put my explanation in an appendix to the piano syllabus. For anyone interested, “Music Modes Explained” is Appendix B of www.lakesidepress.com/PianoSyllabus.pdf, I have also put the first two pages into this book’s [Appendix E](#).

“Larry, can you play anything?”

After these last five chapters I envision having the following conversation with the benumbed reader.

Reader: Larry, you have five chapters on your writing about music. What about *playing* music. You seem to concentrate mainly on the piano. Can you play anything?

Larry: Well, okay, I haven't mentioned my playing much, and for a reason. This book is “My Writing Life.” If it was instead “My Musical Life,” it would be about a page long. But to answer your question, I have been taking piano lessons intermittently since retirement, so I know my way around the keyboard. I can identify every key.

Reader: Okay, so you can't play anything? All you do is write about it?

Larry: No, I'm sorry if I've given the wrong impression. I can play several pieces. The problem, to belabor the point made earlier, is that I cannot play any piece with proficiency or musicality. My aged brain simply can't process the notes to achieve what a child can do who is first learning the piano. First, there is an innate lack of musical talent. And second, I started decades too late.

Reader: So, you just write about music instead? I did read your comment, “those who can, play music, while those who can't, write about it.”

Larry: Yeah, that was supposed to be funny.

Reader: Okay, but what exactly can you play, even if it's not with what you call ‘musicality’?

Larry: I do have a repertoire, but nothing I would ever play in public. Or for you. Sorry.

Reader: How about student recitals? Haven't you played before other students?

(Pause, as I take out my cell phone and look for a photo.)

Reader: What's the matter?

Larry: Oh, nothing. Your question brings up a painful memory. I was looking for a picture. Okay, I found it. I once did play before other students, and their friends and relatives.

Reader: Tell me about it. How'd it go?

Larry: In June 2019 I attended a course offered by The Chicago Institute of Music, in Evanston, IL, called Adult Piano Camp. The only requirement was that you had to have at least one year's experience playing piano. When I inquired, they said many of the students were like me, relative beginners. So, I signed up. At the end of the three-day course all the students were encouraged to play a short piece at a Sunday afternoon recital, open to the public. It was to be held in Evanston's Nichols Concert Hall. A real concert hall with a concert grand piano. Here, I found the cover of the program.

Reader: (Looks at the cover.) Sounds exciting. So, you played?

Larry: At first, I did not volunteer to perform. Each of the 22 other students seemed so much better than me. I was out of my league, so to speak. If I ranked all the students from 1 to 10, with 10 being like a professional, and 1 being a beginner, I was like a 2; the other “campers” ranked in my mind from 5 to 9. A couple of them clearly played at level 8 or 9. Anyway, they all signed up to play at the recital— except me.

Reader: So, you played or you didn’t play?

Larry: Well, when it became apparent I was the sole holdout, I was encouraged to play, so I agreed – reluctantly.

Reader: What piece did you choose?

Larry: The only one I had any confidence in, which I had been practicing for the better part of, oh, at least two years. It’s a piece once attributed to Bach, but now known to be composed by Christian Petzold: Minuet in G.

Reader: How’d it go?

Larry: Not well. Tremendous stage freight. My wife Ruth and our youngest daughter Amy were in the audience. Both of them are piano players. And lots of other students’ relatives were there as well. Anyway, the minuet is in two short parts. I stumbled on the first part, had to start over in the middle, and by the time I finished the second part I was done. I did not do the repeats, and happily walked off the stage.

Reader: To applause?

Larry: Absolutely – for the fact I was done and gone.

Reader: How’d the other students do?

Larry: Only one other stumbled and had to repeat a section. The others were like semi-professionals. Some of the pieces played are, to me, incredibly difficult. Like Chopin’s Nocturne in C minor. And a movement from Bach’s Concerto in F minor.

Reader: So, no more recitals?

Larry: No. Too much anxiety. But my teachers have not arranged any either, so it’s not an issue

Reader: And to this day you are still not what you would call proficient with that Minuet in G?

Larry: It’s okay, but still not what anyone would call “musical.”

Reader: Can I see your repertoire list?

Larry: Okay, I’ll show it to you. But keep in mind, for every piece on this list I am somewhere between fifty and eighty percent proficient. In each one, no matter how much I practice, I hesitate or slow down, looking for the notes, then continue. Even with several of the fake book



songs, which include just the treble clef and associated chords. They are all in the key of C major.

Reader: Your teachers haven't been able to help you get better?

Larry: They have tried. But look what they are up against. Lack of talent. Advanced age.

Reader: Then why do you persist?

Larry: Good question. Here's the list.

| <u>Composer or Source</u> | <u>Music</u> |
|---------------------------|---|
| Muzio Clementi | Sonatina Op. 36, No. 1 (3 movements) |
| Bela Bartok | Mikrokosmos, Book 1 – pieces 1-14 |
| Dimitri Kabalevsky | Marching, Song, Dance, Polka, from “24 Little Pieces” |
| J.S. Bach | Prelude No. 1 in C major Musette, in D major Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring |
| Christian Petzold | Minuet in G Major Minuet in G Minor |
| Friedrich Burgmueller | from “25 Easy and Progressive Pieces”: La Candeur, L'Arabesque, La Pastorale, Ballade |
| Ludwig Beethoven | Alexander March |
| Theodore Oesten | Spanish Dance |
| C.L. Hanon | from Book 1: Exercises 1, 2, 3, 9 |
| Method Books | Selected pieces from Alfred, Faber, Bastien, Snell, and others |
| Fake Book Songs | Yesterday, Try to Remember, Bye Bye Love, Earth Angel Hello Dolly, Can't Help Lovin Dat Man, Doe Re Me Raindrops Keep Falling, Beauty and the Beast, Edelweiss Let It Be, Til There Was You, Fly Me to the Moon Groovy Kind of Love |

Postscript

My struggles with piano led me to write a fantasy-style short story, “My Deal With The You Know Who.” In 2019 the story won a Bronze medal in the Florida Writers Association's Royal Palm Literary Awards competition.

The story's protagonist is a successful writer who takes up piano in middle age. As to be expected (hah!) he becomes frustrated over his inability to play well. One day he meets the You Know Who and learns that, for a price, he can become a successful pianist. This story is included in *What Just Landed in The Villages and Other Short Fiction*. Here are the opening paragraphs.



“My Deal With The You Know Who”

I entered Jake’s Deli on Cleveland’s west side and, as instructed, took a seat in one of the booths. The waitress came over and I told her I was waiting for someone, and we would order together. A minute later he walked in. From a distance, he seemed to be just another guy coming from the parking lot. Though we had never met, he seemed to recognize me right away. He walked straight to the booth, sat opposite me.

“Hello,” he said, in a deep baritone voice that sounded affected. I was still skeptical at that point. We shook hands. His hand felt cool, almost clammy, and his grip quite strong.

“Hi,” I said, rather meekly. “Why did you choose Jake’s Deli for this meeting?”

“They have great pastrami, of course. Good enough reason.”

I searched for some sign of his identity and think I found it in his face. The angles were sharper, more unnatural-looking, and his eyes were deeper into the sockets than normal, as if he was made up for some horror movie. He wore a felt hat and I am certain there were two protrusions, one on either side of his head, poking up the felt. This was no imposter, or if so, a very good one.

The Boy Who Dreamed Mount Everest

Once I finished the picture book *Gravity Will Always Pull You Down*, I decided to write a middle-grade fiction for kids age eight to twelve. (The next level, young adult fiction is for readers twelve to eighteen.)

At the time, early 2015, my oldest grandson, Eli, was nine, and active with indoor rock climbing. In fact, I used this picture of him climbing an indoor wall in the *Gravity* book. I wanted to include him and something about “climbing” in the new book.

And if you like to rock climb, it is always a good idea to prepare for a possible fall. Either use a harness to keep you from falling or, as with this brave boy, have a nice padded floor below. Remember, gravity is always there. Be prepared!



Sometimes gravity is good, sometimes not so good. If you're careful, you'll know when gravity can hurt you. But as long as you stay on earth, you will always feel the effects of gravity.

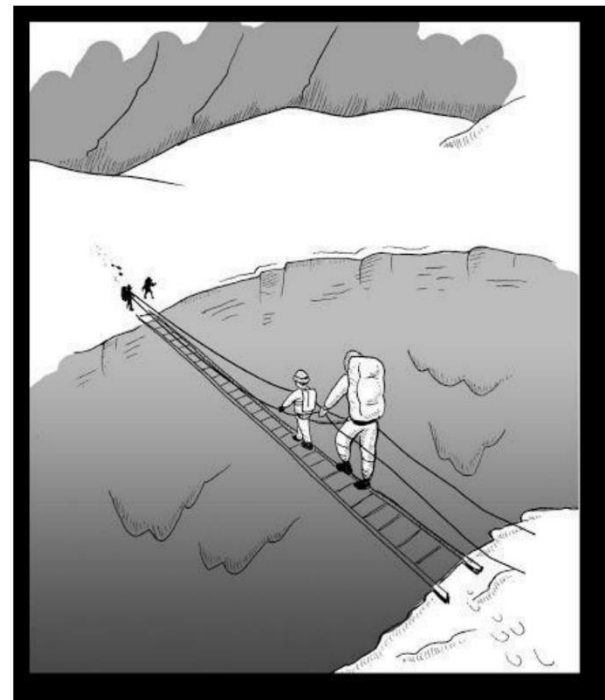
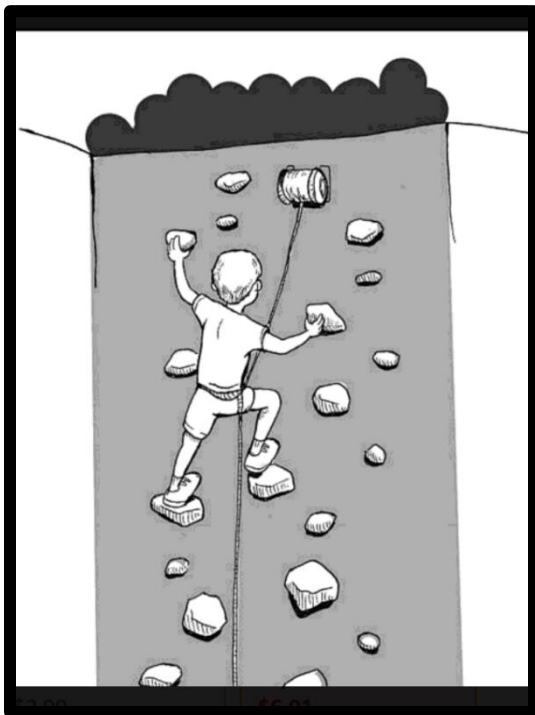
I suggested this idea to his mother Joanna, our oldest daughter, and she replied, “What about climbing Mt. Everest?”

Of course! High altitude hypoxia has always fascinated me, and I had written about the subject in my physiology textbooks. To learn even more about this topic, I had also created a website about Mt. Everest oxygen levels.¹

Lots of little facts. Available oxygen at the summit, 29,032 feet, is only a third of that at sea-level. Almost everyone uses tank oxygen to make the climb, but a few have done it without so-called supplemental oxygen – and survived! Climbers who reach the summit don’t spend much time there, one reason being that the low oxygen levels could kill at any time. For good reason, the mountain region above 26,000 feet is known as the “death zone.”

I’ve never been to the Himalayas, but knew enough about the Everest summit attempts to write a book for kids. Eli at nine was too young to actually climb the mountain, even in fiction. (The youngest climber to reach the summit was Jordan Romero, age thirteen when he did it in May 2010.²) So, I set up a scenario where Eli, an active indoor climber, *dreams* about climbing the world’s highest mountain. With his friends.

I called my novella *The Boy Who Dreamed Mount Everest*. I anticipated a year to write the book and see it published, so I made Eli ten years old in the story. I decided to illustrate the book with black and white drawings, done by local artist Dan Traynor. The one shown on the left is based on the photo above. The one on the right is from a scene in the book.



I completed the manuscript in early 2016, at 19,000 words, and wrote this blurb for my back cover.

Eli is ten and lives in Chicago. He loves to rock climb in Bubba's indoor gym. He's never climbed any mountain, but is fascinated with Mount Everest, the tallest in the world. From reading he has learned the route to the top, and the dangers that can befall climbers. Eli begins dreaming he's on a special Bubba's Kids Expedition to climb Everest. Night after night, his dreams take him higher up the mountain. Bad things happen, and sometimes his dreams turn into nightmares. During the day he argues with his little sister, worries his parents, daydreams in school, thinks about a cute girl in his class, and tries to figure out math problems. But at night, asleep, he continues to climb. Will Eli and his buddies reach the summit?

Come join the expedition! Along the way you will learn a lot about what it takes to climb Mount Everest.

In early July 2016, I queried six agents about the book and got six rejections. A couple of agents actually sent personal replies. Regarding the whole process of querying agents, here's what I wrote in July 2016.

Monday, July 4, 2016

Each [agent query] is a pain, with different requirements, and only one allowing an attachment. When you paste text in an email the formatting is all messed up, but most agents say they will not open an attachment. More and more I think agents are not worth the effort. Their submission requirements are antediluvian, they take up to 3 months to even respond (and state if you don't hear by then, assume it's a rejection). I'm going to publish before then, for sure. They seem to be in a mid-20th century business model, not really smart. Smart would be having a secure repository where a pdf file could be sent. Smart would be having a system to screen submissions fast; at FWA [convention] agents hear pitches for 10 minutes and make a decision. Smart would be getting together with other agencies and having uniform submission guidelines. They instead operate like a bunch of outmoded boutiques from the 1980s. Amazon is eating their lunch, and with good reason. I will give them a few weeks, then self-publish. I have two copy readers lined up...

To emphasize the point in my journal rant, here is the standard wording on websites from agents you may never hear from.

Due to the high volume of submissions, please keep in mind we are no longer able to personally respond to every submission. However, we read every submission with care and often share for a second read within the office. If we are interested, we will contact you by email to request additional materials (such as a complete manuscript or additional manuscripts). Please keep us updated if there is a change in the status of your project, such as an offer of representation or book contract.

If you have not heard from us in 6-8 weeks, your project is not right for our agency at the current time and we wish you all the best with your writing.

It makes no sense that an agency could read what you send, sometimes twice, and not have the time or the will to send a simple rejection notice. Of course, not all book agents are this arrogant. Some are quite considerate and responsive. On July 5, 2016, I wrote in my journal that I was surprised to hear from an agent that morning, since I had queried him just the day before. Here is his email.

Thanks for telling me about your novel and for sharing a few chapters. I like your concept --- the real world and the rich world of imagination -- but the narrative doesn't really come alive for me.

There needs to be more focus on Eli and his inner world, as well as his reality. The narrative seems a bit diffuse right now with too much information about all the characters. Be sure to keep your focus on your protagonist and what will hold your readers' attention.

And I do thank you for contacting our agency. I send my good wishes.

Stephen Fraser
The Jennifer De Chiara Literary Agency

I did not disagree with Mr. Fraser's assessment, and began revising the book, adding another 2000 words. However, in early 2016, before I queried any agents, I had entered the unpublished manuscript in Florida Writers Association's Royal Palm Literary Awards competition – the same manuscript sent to the book agents. In June 2016, I learned this book was a finalist in the unpublished middle-grade fiction category, which meant it could win one of the three top prizes in that competition.

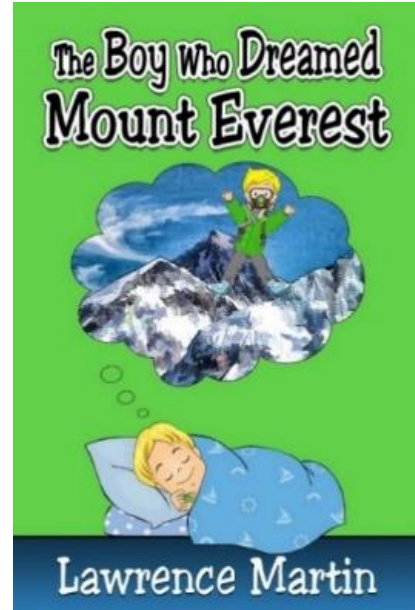
RPLA holds its awards banquet every October (except 2020-2021, due to Covid), and only then do finalists learn if they won an award. I went to the banquet and to my surprise (not a cliché but my actual, real surprise) the book won second place award in its category.

After receiving the award, I went ahead and self-published the revised manuscript under my Lakeside Press imprint. Based on my suggestions, and after several iterations, Judy Bullard at custombookcovers.com created a great cover, shown below.



I thought the changes improved the story over what I had submitted to RPLA and the book agents. So, you may ask, why didn't I send the revised work, along with news of the FWA award, out to more agents? The short answer is, I thought it would be futile, a waste of time. This attitude is at odds with what many published authors recommend, which is: Don't give up!

But on every book, despite awards received, and mostly positive reviews on Amazon, I do give up – on agents and traditional publishers. Probably a mistake, for the self-published books generally go nowhere in sales.

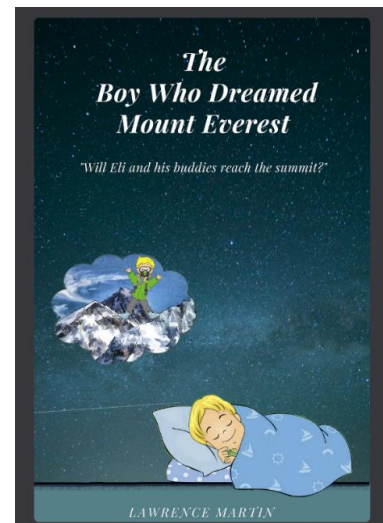


Certainly, for younger authors, who have more time and more resolve to find a traditional publisher, the advice is sound and worth repeating: don't give up!

Postscript

A year after I self-published the book, a start-up local publisher, Newhouse Creative Group (NCG), asked if I would let them republish it for their growing catalog of kids' books. Since the book was going nowhere, due to my marketing inertia, and no fee was involved, I agreed. NCG re-did the cover but did not alter any text. If you search the internet for the title, you are likely to encounter either cover.

Being a startup with limited resources, NCG's books are not heavily marketed. However, my novella is up to seven mostly-five-star reviews, and who knows? Maybe, one day...



1. <http://www.lakesidepress.com/pulmonary/MtEverest/bloodgases.htm>
2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jordan_Romero

Liberty Street – Through 2016

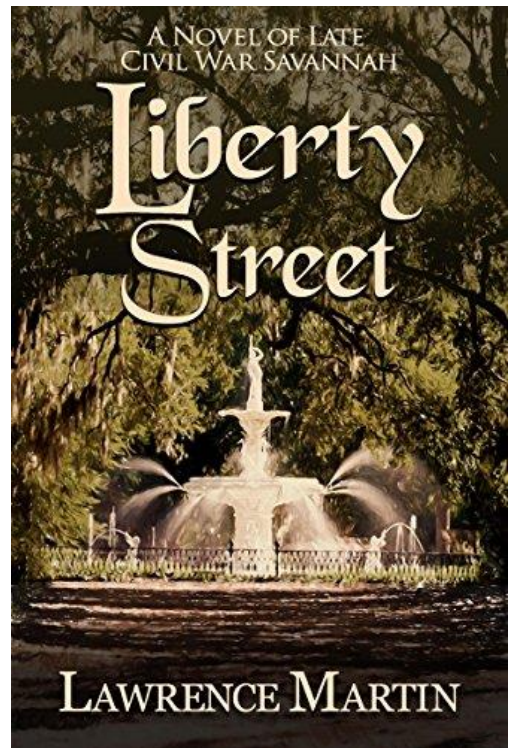
This chapter and the following two chapters detail my path to writing *Liberty Street*, A novel of Late Civil War Savannah. They will likely only be of interest to people who have struggled to write a full-length work of fiction, or who have experienced rejection of their work by book agents.

James Patterson, the most prolific of living authors, strongly advocates creating an outline when starting a new novel, a point he makes often in his Master Class video (masterclass.com). Thus, his writing approach is that of a plotter, as opposed to a pantsler, an author who writes by the seat of his pants.

In my prize-winning blog, “Pour Out Your Words,” I advocate writing as a pantsler. That’s been my method. Of course, the best method is whatever works for the writer. For me, writing an outline doesn’t work, since I don’t know where my novel is going until I start writing it.

Which brings me to perhaps my most successful work of fiction, *Liberty Street: A Novel of Late Civil War Savannah*. It’s the third of my Civil War series centered around Savannah, and won 2nd place for published Historical Fiction in FWA’s 2018 awards.

What follows is a sequence of journal notes showing how this novel evolved, i.e., my “pantsler” method. From start to self-publication took about a year, starting in July 2016. During this period I read parts of the novel in four different critique clubs. The feedback received was invaluable. Three of the clubs met weekly: WOV (Writers of The Villages), CW (Creative Writers), and Wannabes (Wannabe Writers). The fourth was a small private group that met in the writers’ homes once a month.

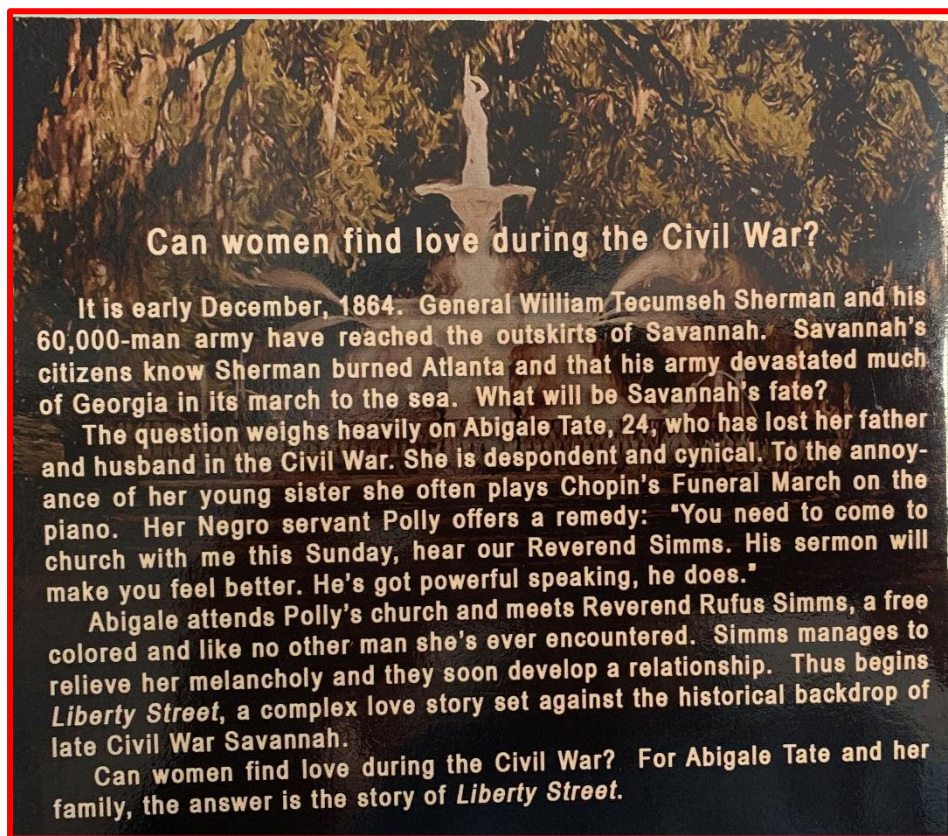


I also sent the novel out to several beta-readers, who agree to read it and offer their comments. They are not editors or necessarily professional authors, but generally avid readers who can provide some good feedback.

During the year of writing the story kept evolving. Without the feedback, particularly from the critique clubs, the title of this chapter could have been “The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly,” with not that much good. The iterative process of feedback while writing helped me shape the novel into what I hope –for readers of historical Civil War fiction – is a true “page turner.” The overarching theme of this process can be summarized simply.

Write-get feedback-revise.

In the journal entries quoted some character names from the novel are mentioned. It will therefore be helpful to first read the back cover blurb, copied below. The journal is quoted exactly as written in 2016-2017. My comments about some of the entries are bracketed in bold-face. Spoiler Alert: The journal entries will reveal some of the plot, which might or might not spoil your eventual reading of the book.



July 30, 2016

Last night I wrote a thousand words as part of the first chapter of my new novel, *Liberty Street*. I will work on that some more before Wednesday.

August 1, 2016

Home all day working some more on new chapter for *Liberty Street* (have made constant revisions),

August 3, 2016

I am knee deep in several projects. Here is a rundown....

Liberty Street novel – I must have revised the first chapter 30 times at least. After I thought I had it done, yesterday morning, I realized that I mis-named the family as the Tates, when my protagonist, married, would have a different name!

What a boo-boo. So I rushed to fix that. Every time I read it, and it's only 1600 words, I found something that didn't sound right. I stopped editing last night and printed 12 copies. I'll distribute them at CW today if my turn comes up. The novel is in my head, but realistically this project will take at least 6 months, possibly a year, to complete. It will probably be my last novel.

August 12, 2016

I also sent out yesterday Chapter 1 of *Liberty Street*, and got an unusually harsh rebuke from Millard [Johnson, head of the writing critique group I was in at the time]. I'm not sure if it's anything I should even consider, as he objects to the entire tone of the chapter, from start to finish. My writing per se is never criticized, but I am often criticized for my approach or what I include or don't include. This piece was also criticized at the CW meeting last week, and I did revise it since then. Millard objects to all the historical background I place in the first chapter. So far no one else has responded. Here's what he wrote.

Larry, I'm sorry to say but this is far from your best writing. You are embarking on what can be an inventive, interesting, and exciting piece of fiction, but your fiction is shot through with telling scenes and events that should be shown. You rush into your major characters given them little depth and fullness. You have given me, not so much of a story as a plot outline. You can do, and have done, much better.

Start again. Take your time. Begin with a captivating hook and build on a solid foundation. Don't worry about the backstory of Sherman's march at this early point in your novel. Flesh out the major characters and the environment of Savannah.

I hope you understand intend this criticism to help you write better.

[This was very early in the writing process and Millard's negative comments were well taken; extensive revisions would follow.]

August 27, 2016

Yesterday morning I spent 3 hours at [club held in a writer's home] where the small group of 4 people analyzed and critiqued my Chapter 1 of *Liberty Street* in minute detail – too minute...I'm not sure I'm going to want to spend 3 hours on one chapter, even mine. A lot of their suggestions were useful, however, and yesterday and this morning I made revisions, and just sent it out to Wannabe's [critique club] for Monday.

[I later resigned from this group, but continued with the other three critique clubs]

Sept 28, 2016

Monday: Read Chapter 3 of *Liberty Street* at Wannabes. Comments rather impressive. Rick said right away, "this is good, reads like a book." Others said it

was very good. Mark Pryor said that if I read this on Friday morning [at the private home critique club], they'd have nothing to talk about for the 3 hours. There were a few useful comments that caused me to make some changes.

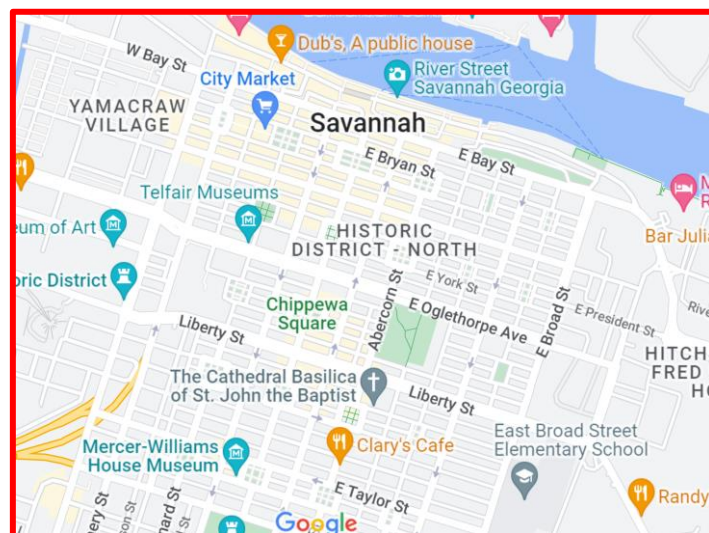
Dec 31, 2016

Did some more work on *Liberty Street* today, on chapters about Savannah Gardens, and Battle of Selma on April 2nd – gave Johnny [Abigale Tate's brother] major leg injury; now he's on his way back to Savannah...

Still have major hole to fill in – February and March. And of course the ending. I'm thinking of having him end up with precursor of KKK, and he threatens to kill Simms when he learns his sister has been his lover (from Gustav, of course). Meanwhile Union army is trying to root out this renegade Confederate group, and they go after Johnny and his gang just before they are about to kill Rufus and burn his church down again. Abigale finds out, rushes to protect Rufus (?in church ?in his home) and somehow, in the end, has to decide between Rufus or saving her brother. Good vs. Evil.

I also have to get Abigale a new lover, probably a carpetbagger from New York who comes to Savannah by ship in February, someone she will eventually marry.

[After six months the novel is still evolving in my mind. An outline would not have helped much, if at all. In looking back at my journal, nowhere did I write my reason for the title. Here it is. Liberty Street is a main thoroughfare in downtown Savannah, dating from before the Civil War. (See Google map, below; in the preface to the novel I have a map dating from 1856). The heroine lives on Liberty Street. More importantly, the street's name signifies her evolution, from despondency and a feeling of helplessness to emotional emancipation: she becomes at 'liberty' to shape her own destiny, including choice of lovers.]



Liberty Street – Through Agents Queried

January 2, 2017

Worked some more on *Liberty Street* this morning, including a draft of the ending (Johnny is killed by union soldiers just before he tries to kill Simms; Abigale sees this happen as she was trying to prevent him from entering Simms's house.)

Last night I combined Chapters 6 and 7 into one, since they take place simultaneously, in two different houses. This is what I'll read at the Friday critique group on Jan 20, unless they find someone else to replace me before then. [I had resigned from this group but agreed to another meeting until they found a replacement.]

January 15, 2017

Started new chapter for *Liberty Street*. Last night...got idea to make Abigale's new love interest – a Union major – also a pianist. When she goes to be interviewed by him regarding black church fires, she hears him playing Chopin! They become interested in each other, and I think I will have her end up marrying him, and moving to Brooklyn.

[I had to research Chopin (1810-1849), to make sure his sheet music was known and available during the Civil War period. Most middle- and upper-income families had pianos, and the good pianists played Chopin.]

January 23, 2017

For much of weekend I was busy writing on *Liberty Street*...Several ideas for chapters of the book; they keep coming.

Wednesday, February 15, 2017

Went to WOV yesterday, read a section of *Liberty Street* for Valentine's Day; part of chapter where she finally succumbs to Rufus. They didn't have much to say about it; some thought it was over the top, though.

February 27, 2017

I've also worked on *Liberty Street*, and over weekend updated the synopsis and wrote some more in various chapters. About 80% finished. Not sure how to end it. Johnny has to die, but does Sanford kill him? Or Rufus? Not sure.

[Sanford, a Union officer with rank of major, is Abigale's new lover]

March 11, 2017

Did some more work on *Liberty Street* this morning, and now nearing the end. Have just four chapters to finish; three will be easy, they're all in my head. The hardest will be the last chapter, as I'm not sure of ending. May write two endings, one where Abigale ends up with Sanford and other where she doesn't. To end up with Sanford, someone else has to kill Johnny. If Sanford kills him,

there is no way she can end up with the major. I am inclined to the unhappy ending.

March 13, 2017

Also wrote some more on *Liberty Street* last night. Was not sure how to end it, and I told Ruth what I had so far, and my “ending” quandary. She came up with a brilliant suggestion: have a black soldier kill Johnny, not the major. That way, Abigale can still end up with the major and have a happy ending. Don’t know why I didn’t think of that ending.

So this morning, for three hours, I wrote the final chapters. Jane goes to find soldiers and comes upon a black regiment on Oglethorpe Square. The white captain sends out his black cavalry, led by the man whose partner was killed by Johnny at an earlier church arson. That soldier then kills Johnny, and afterwards identifies Johnny’s horse as the one he saw the night of the church burning. Then, after all the mayhem, Sanford shows up. He does not have any aspect of Johnny’s murder on his hands, so Abigale can now end up with him. Brilliant ending compared to what I had before, when I was thinking of having Sanford kill Johnny, but then she could never marry him and the ending would have been a downer.

For those 3 hours I vomited the words on the screen, and it will take me a while to clean them up, but the first rough draft is FINISHED. It’s at 84,000+ words. I don’t expect much more than 85,000, a good length for historical fiction. Need to finish the draft before April 30 if I want to submit it to FWA Royal Palm; won’t have it ready this month. Will seek beta readers. But now it has a happy ending. Much better than before.

March 15, 2017

After finishing and mailing taxes on Monday, my main activity has been *Liberty Street*. Stayed home all day and worked on novel, except for an hour or so practicing piano. Have made several changes to novel, and tweaked several chapters. Changes include:

- Having Negro soldier kill Johnny
- Adding scenes after he is buried, including Sanford’s decision to minimize publicity
- Announcement that Abigale and Sanford are going to get married in New York, and that Janes’ lover is returning to Savannah to marry her.
- Adding Mayor Arnold’s Dec 28 proclamations to Appendix
- Short scene where Abigale asks Sanford why he joined army
- Scene where Sanford questions Abigale about her relationship with Simms. Currently have about 87,000 words.
- Scene where Sanford explains why he didn’t want a lot of publicity over the capture of the terrorists.

Part 1: 46K words

Part 2: 38K words

Epilogue & Appendix: 3K words

Total: @87,000 words

The draft is essentially finished, but there is more work to do. I got an email reply from Georgia Historical Society to my question about money used during the Sherman occupation; they sent me an 1865 article I had previously read, about sending supplies to Savannah, and which mentions that Sherman made all confederate money worthless. However, it's just a statement in that article, with no reference, and I still have no information about how people transacted business. It's amazing how this is omitted in every book about Sherman's march through Georgia, and in Jones' book *Saving Savannah*. I emailed them back that their application for advanced research can't be filled out on line, and they replied confirming that. An historical society still in the early 20th century.

[Georgia Historical Society is an agency I used for my research. They were not yet caught up with advances in internet searching. On one Savannah visit I spent some time in their library across from Forsythe Park.]

March 21, 2017

In the afternoon I worked on *Liberty Street* and this work finished the first draft. Done. Now it needs polishing, refinement, proofreading, more editing, etc. I also have some concerns about the story, but at this point am not inclined to make big changes. One concern is that Abigale's affair with Sanford goes too smoothly, with no real tension. Also, the parts with Sarah and Gustav aren't resolved, they're just left hanging. Someone could legitimately ask, what's the point of the scene with Sarah? I intended it as backstory for when Gustav offers her services to Johnny, and also as a scene to introduce Sophie's affection for Gustav – but is that necessary? Etc. Will see what beta-readers say. I plan to submit this as unpublished manuscript in FWA, and have 5 weeks to polish it.

March 23, 2017

It has been mostly non-stop with *Liberty Street*. I keep revising the draft. Added new scene where Abigale asks Sanford to do something about Gustav, and he decides on army order to keep soldiers away from Savannah Gardens. Then Mayor questions why Gustav is only one receiving such an order.

Also have started going through and eliminating “was” and “went” from as much text as possible. When I was writing review of King's *On Writing* for the newsletter yesterday, realized my own culpability about past tense. I have way too much use of “was.” About one out of every 100 words is “was.” I've since eliminated or changed at least 50, but will have to keep working on this passive tense problem. As King points out, it's the hallmark of a weak writer. [Stephen King's *On Writing* is referred to often in this book. Highly recommended.] I just posted a request for beta readers on Goodreads.com, specifying I want someone who is interested in historical fiction re: Civil War. See what comes in.

March 25, 2017- 3 pm

Non-stop work on the book...

I am getting rid of many “was's”, which takes time. I also found out, thru research on Epilogue, that Gazaway Lamar's wife Hariett, who figures prominently in scenes from 1864, actually died in 1861! So I decided to change to

a fictional husband and wife. Now it's Lamar Casey instead of the real Gazaway Lamar. I just changed Harriett's name to Lucretia.

[Gazaway Bugg Lamar (1798–1874) is one of the real historical characters appearing in the novel. He was a cotton merchant and supported the Confederate side from his home in Savannah.]

As I read each section I keep rewriting, getting rid of passive sentences. Amazing how many I have. Decided to send a chapter to Wannabes for Monday; chose No. 19 from Part 2, and when I reviewed it, I found many ways to improve the writing.

So though my draft of *Liberty Street* is finished, it's still requiring a lot of rewriting. I have come up empty with two posts for beta readers on Goodreads and Civil War Forum, so I've decided to try Fiverr. That site is a lot cheaper and with two or three good beta reads I may should be able to catch most mistakes. I just sent this message to one person whose posting looks professional:

86K Civil War Novel. Can be done in sections, not all at once. I have authored 20 books so know how to write, but always need careful beta reading for the usual reasons. I am most interested in a quality beta-read (plot, character development, obvious grammatical and syntax errors).

Please respond ONLY if you have any interest/or experience with historical fiction. It is a complex love story built around late Civil War Savannah, Ga. It contains language that is of the period, but may be offensive to some (The N word and swear words), plus scenes alluding to sexual encounters.

She replied she'd love to read it, in 4 sections at \$15 each. I then replied that's reasonable, should have something to send in a few days.

March 30, 2017

Woke up at 6 ... Spent hour redoing part 2 of *Liberty Street*, found MAJOR ERROR. I had her at Rufus' house ready to take him to Major Sanford to find army safe place. That was dumb; her whole point was NOT to involve Sanford. Had to change that fast, so hit on idea of a colored hotel "run by the freedmen's bureau."

April 1, 2017

Ruth read first page of *Liberty Street* and right away saw a problem. Really can't use first African Baptist church since it's a real, existing church in Savannah. Someone will object. Have to change the name of first and third Baptist. Have decided on fist Zion Baptist Church, 2nd Zion, etc. Ruth didn't like Zion either because there are churches with that name around Savannah, though not in 1864. So went back to google and now have come up with two other possibilities

FIRST OGEECHEE COLORED BAPTIST CHURCH
SECOND ”
THIRD ”
Or
FIRST EBENEZER COLORED BAPTIST CHURCH

Both Ebenezer and Ogeechee have been used in various church names, but not in Savannah in 1860s and not currently, so either one of those should be fine. Will do some more research.

April 12, 2017

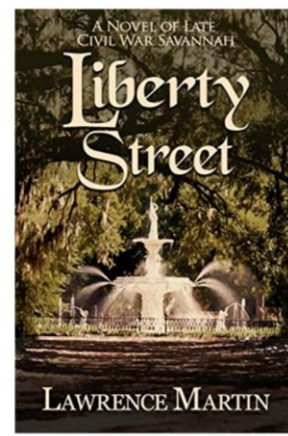
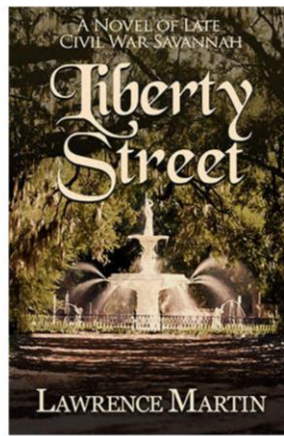
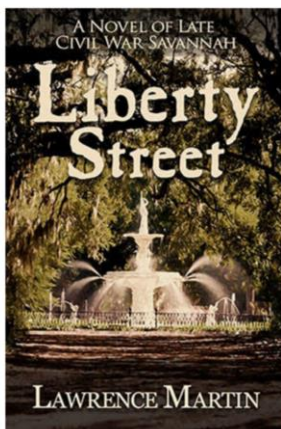
Past three days I've done a lot of work on *Liberty Street*, and this morning changed Appendix so it is footnoted in the text. I have re-reviewed the two beta reads. One hated it, one sort of liked it.

April 16, 2017

I had one other thought: *not* submitting *Liberty Street* to RPLA [Royal Palm Literary Awards, run by the Florida Writers Association] If it wins, and I'm not there [at the awards banquet], that will be awkward, but also it would prevent me from submitting the published work the following year. I had that situation already with the *Everest* book. Winning for a short story is one thing, but winning for an unpublished novel is more significant. So not being at the banquet, and the fact that if *Liberty Street* won I couldn't then submit the published book the following year, are leaning me against sending the unpublished book this year. That decision also saves the \$90 submission fee.

Friday, April 21, 2017 – 8 am

I continue to tweak *Liberty Street*. Everyday this past week I've added or rewritten sections. Judy Bullard is working on the cover, and has sent me two. She did a nice job with the Forsythe Park photo, but problems with lettering. First one [left] I didn't like the lettering for *Liberty Street* – seemed uneven. Second one [middle] the L in liberty looks like a T; Ruth said (and I agree) it looks like “Tiberty.” At this writing Judy is working on it. [Final cover is on the right.]



Unless you have artistic skills, I strongly recommend a professionally-designed cover for self-published books.

May 1, 2017

I've spent quite a bit of time sending queries to agents, 11 so far. I'm 95% sure it's a futile gesture. They are so incredibly insular and aloof; except for accepting email, their procedures are rooted in the mid-twentieth century, e.g., taking "3 months" to respond.

[My gripe was not the rejections – that's to be expected, it's part of being a writer. My gripe was the communication process. If an agent is going to solicit and accept submissions, they should have the decency to respond to the sender. That's true even if ninety-nine percent of the stuff they receive is not worth considering for publication.]

Liberty Street – Through Publication

May 5, 2017

Made more revisions on *Liberty Street*. Decided to revise slightly the chapter on Fort McAllister battle, to introduce a character who is killed there, Johnny's friend. Johnny finds out after he gets home in April, and feels betrayed by the army that left the fort relatively undefended.

Wednesday, May 24, 2017

Monday I went to Wannabes and read the last chapter of *Liberty Street*, Ch. 48. It was well received, with a few suggestions that led to some rewriting. So overall, helpful.

I got email from Fiverr woman who did proofing, asking if I wanted to proceed. She found a few things, but 80% of her changes I rejected...I decided not to [continue with her]. Enough, already. I've got to go over it myself.

May 27, 2017

Made more changes to *Liberty Street*, more minor revisions. Have had some feedback on Ch. 39, from WOV. Some criticism about using "comma splice" from [club member]; I was not aware of this rule, and think it's stupid, for the most part. I changed a few commas, but left most of them in. What's most annoying is that using comma splice is supposed to be the hallmark of an amateur, yet many famous writers used it. You can do anything if you're already famous and published. If not, you're supposed to be grammatically perfect.

Got replies from all but three beta readers that they do plan to read *Liberty Street*, but no feedback received yet. One beta reader said she couldn't review the book because the heroine is too much like what she's writing in a novel. Two haven't responded.

May 28, 2017

Received first beta reader report this morning. It's detailed...and highly critical. I think the reader lives in Australia. Here is the opening email. The document she attached goes page by page with multiple concerns, problems noted. It will lead to some rewriting.

Dear Larry,

I have now read through *Liberty Street* and am afraid it doesn't quite work for me. This is just my opinion but if you find other readers making similar points, it might be worth giving some thought to any recurring criticisms.

For me this felt as if you have spliced two stories together. I found the sections following the progress of the war and Johnny's part in it very interesting and would say this area is definitely your strength. Abigale and Jane's stories worked less well and in great part this was due to characterization, I could not understand why

they were behaving in the way they were. It might be worth thinking about who you think your audience is and which aspects of the story would interest them most and try to strengthen those elements.

I have attached a document which summarizes my thoughts and highlights those things within the text that made me pause. I hope it is of some use in the development of your story. If you have any questions about it, do get back to me. Thank you for letting me read and comment on *Liberty Street*.

Good luck and best wishes,
[Signed]

I replied:

Thanks much for your very detailed and thoughtful beta read. Your concerns about the characters of Abigale and Jane have been raised by others, so I clearly need to reconsider how they are presented to the reader. Your page-by-page commentary is very helpful, and will lead to some changes. So thanks again - I really appreciate the effort you put into it.

Larry

Wednesday, 6 pm, May 31, 2017

Did some more work on *Liberty Street*. I have written in a new character, Franklin's mother, who takes Abigale to task about not wearing mourning clothes months after her husband's death. I have some conversations between them, and now have Abigale wearing a black arm band, and have taken her and Sanford out of the Pulaski restaurant, at it's too public a place. I also changed the scene a bit where she earlier went to rent a room to continue her affair with Rufus. Now she merely goes to look at the room without a valise, and then meets Jane.

In other words, I am making her more cautious and circumspect than she was before these revisions, a change brought about by various comments. I also tweaked the ending a little bit, to show Abigale feels compelled to get out of town not only because of her past affair with Rufus, but also due to Franklin's nutty mother living nearby.

Saturday, 8 am, June 3, 2017

Have spent hours redoing parts of *Liberty Street*; created new character, Susan Tate, Franklin's mother, who bothers Abigale about wearing mourning clothes. Just sent that new section – part of Chapter 8 – to Wannabes.

June 5, 2017

I think *Liberty Street* is getting much better. Heard from [friend] last night; said he liked the book, found a few errors (which I and everyone else has missed), but did not give any more detail criticism or comments. He did think it could be a PBS series. I thanked him, said I'd send a copy when published.

Friday, June 30, 2017 – 5 pm

...got two agent rejections today from agents who actually looked at the material. They were personal emails. I've more or less wasted a year on this novel, but really, it's the same situation with the other two Civil War novels, as well as *Consenting Adults Only* and *The Boy Who Dreamed Everest*. Good writing – doesn't matter. One of the agents even said the writing is "assured."

Can't gain any traction being self-published and, when not yet published, something that simply doesn't interest readers or agents. The situation is disheartening, and makes me want to quit writing – novels at least. There is no point in pushing a dead horse, or whatever the appropriate metaphor is. I will go ahead and self-publish *Liberty Street*, just to be done with it.

Here are the two agent rejections:

June 30, 2017

Dear Larry:

Thank you very much for sending me LIBERTY STREET and thank you for your patience as I considered it.

While this is definitely the kind of project I am interested in, ultimately I wasn't as taken with your manuscript as I need to be in order to fully get behind it, and so I'm going to pass. I must remain extremely careful to only acquire projects about which I am wildly passionate, and thus I feel it is in your best interest that I step aside and allow you to continue your search for representation elsewhere.

Please remember that this is only one opinion in what is a highly subjective business and another agency may very well feel differently. Thank you again for thinking of me, and of Writers House, and the very best of luck to you in your search for the right agent.

Best,

Alec Shane

Writers House, LLC

Dear Dr. Martin,

Thank you for your interest in Source-books and for giving us the chance to review LIBERTY STREET. There was a lot I enjoyed about your novel, especially your assured writing, but I am sorry to say that it is not quite right for our fiction program and I am going to have to pass. The historical fiction market has changed dramatically in the past few years and we are seeing less demand for stories in this time period.

Thank you again for giving us the opportunity to read your work, and wishing you all the very best!

Sincerely,

Anna Michels, Senior Editor

Source-books, Inc. | 1935 Brookdale Road, Suite 139 | Naperville, IL 60563

Postscript

I sent the book to eight agents total, with the above two responses. I did not follow the advice offered by Writers Digest, quoted in the chapter *Out of Time*: “Don’t give up until you’re queried 80 agents or more.” Instead, I self-published the book and amazon reviews have been generally positive. I submitted it to FWA’s writing contest for 2018 and, as stated earlier, it won second prize in the Historical Fiction category. To date I think it’s my best novel.

Once you have self-published a book, unless it becomes a huge bestseller no agent will touch it, so I did not bother querying any more agents.

Pre-Covid Trips in Retirement – Israel and Jordan

One advantage of retirement is freedom to travel when and where you wish. At least, that is, until Covid struck and crippled all travel starting in March 2020. Between 2016 – our first full year in Florida – and the onset of Covid lockdowns in 2020, Ruth and I were able to take several memorable trips, to places we always wanted to see and experience. To do these trips we signed on with different tour companies, noted in parenthesis in the list below. (During this period we made trips to Chicago and New York to see our kids and grandkids; several overnight trips to music festivals in Florida; and trips to Savannah for two high school reunions.)

March 2016 – New Orleans (Road Scholar)
July 2016 – Alaska (John Hall’s Alaska)
Jan 2017 – Death Valley National Park (Road Scholar)
Sept 2017 – South Dakota National Parks (Road Scholar)
Oct 2017 - Israel and Jordan (Road Scholar)
Feb 2018 –Caribbean Cruise (for ukulele club members, via Royal Caribbean)
June 2018 - River cruise from Amsterdam to Budapest (Viking)
Oct 2018 – Peru and Galapagos Islands (Overseas Adventure Travel)
Jan 2019 – The Panama Canal (Road Scholar)
May 2019 – Cuba (Road Scholar)
July 2019 – Cruise of the British Isles (Overseas Adventure Travel)
Nov 2019 – Egypt and Israel (Jewish National Fund)

Only two of these trips led to my writing anything beyond journal entries: the 2017 trip to Israel and Jordan, and the 2019 trip to Egypt and Israel. We added on Egypt for three days with a guide, before joining the JNF-sponsored tour of Israel.

Our first trip to Israel, which also include a few days in Jordan, covered October 14-28, 2017. This was a secular trip, so we were exposed to speakers from all three major religions – (Judaism, Christianity, Islam – and toured sites from these denominations. It was fascinating, eye-opening, educational. I took detailed notes and back home began to write a travelog, which I posted online. It is in seven parts, with plenty of pictures. Below is the first page of the website. <http://www.lakesidepress.com/IsraelTrip.html>

Our First Trip to Israel (and Jordan)

Oct 14-28, 2017

by Lawrence Martin



- [Part 1 - Jerusalem](#)
- [Part 2 - Masada](#)
- [Part 3 - Kibbutz Degania Bet](#)
[WSJ Kibbutz Article Oct 13, 2017](#)
- [Part 4 - Leaving Israel, entering Jordan](#)
[Jaresh Band Video](#)
- [Part 5 - Petra](#)
[Rehab musician in Petra](#)
- [Part 6 - Wadi Rum & The Dead Sea](#)
- [Part 7 - Re-entering Israel: Jerusalem and Tel Aviv](#)

I wanted to share my experience with others, and over two months in early 2018, read the travelog to my critique group (nonfiction is welcomed). Now, you might reasonably think: People don't want to hear about someone else's travels – that ranks up there with tales about your grandchildren. Borrrring!

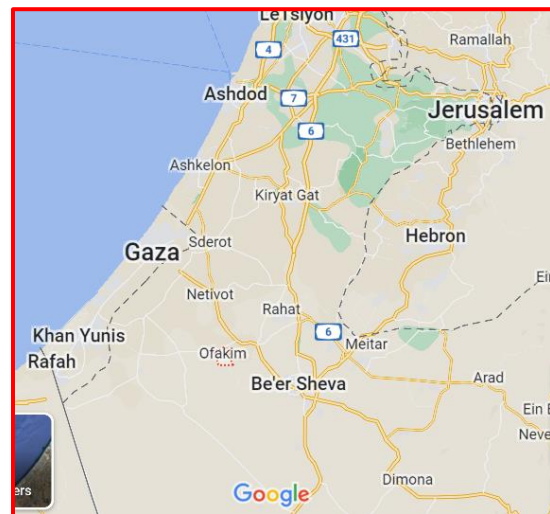
Well, it can be boring, but my critique group was not bored because I worked to make the trip interesting. In the first part (“Jerusalem”) I dealt head-on with the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, writing:

I can gush about all the wonderful things we saw and did, about the amazing people we met, about the history we learned, but in the back of your mind, if you have any curiosity at all, you're going to wonder: Interesting stuff, Larry, but...what about the occupation of the Western Bank? What about the threats to Israel's existence? What about the 'Conflict'?

You can wonder, and throughout the travelogue, I'll be offering a personal perspective, in part gained from this trip. Yes, it is highly presumptuous to offer any opinion after just two weeks in the Holy Land, but so what? That's one reason people travel, to get a new or fresh perspective. This trip raised many questions and gave very few answers, if indeed there are any to give...The future of Israel as a sovereign nation may not be ironclad secure, but the Israelis we met live life in a way that does not suggest uncertainty or even worry. It is an amazing and paradoxical country.

In November 2019 Ruth and I returned to Israel with a "Sunshine tour" [translation: senior tour] sponsored by Jewish National Fund. JNF is a Jewish nonprofit that funds dozens of programs in Israel, ranging from water conservation to horse-riding therapy for disabled children. One of the most memorable parts of this trip was a visit to Sderot, an Israeli town of 30,000 less than a mile from the Gaza border.

Unless you've been living in a cave, you know that from Gaza, missiles are frequently launched to kill Israelis. For protection, all buildings in Sderot (including houses) have "safe rooms," spaces specially-constructed to withstand a missile hit. We visited a large indoor kids' playground there, which has several safe rooms. "From the time a siren goes off," our guide explained, "these kids have fifteen seconds to get into a safe room." Less than a minute was the same message in other nearby towns we visited, including Ofakim. Fifteen seconds in Sderot, thirty seconds in Ofakim. We saw safe rooms everywhere, including at bus stops and in parking lots.



Postscript

These two trips to Israel, 2017 and 2019, led us to consider a third trip, to see other areas of the country. Then Covid hit, and all foreign travel (for us) ceased through 2022. We were not going to travel if the possibility of a positive Covid test could keep us quarantined in some foreign land. Finally, the Covid testing requirements lifted and in late 2022 we came upon a unique opportunity to revisit Israel: a Medical Mission tour, which we took in February 2023. This tour was designed for physicians, to visit many medical sites sponsored by JNF, so we signed up.

Twelve physicians, most retired like us, were taken to facilities ranging from remote medical clinics in the Negev to the tertiary care Hadassah Medical Center in Jerusalem (photo). Along the way we met numerous physicians and medical personnel, and learned much about how socialized medicine works in the country. We also got to see sights missed on our first two trips, including Mitzpe Ramon Valley, Ein Avdat National Park, the Bahai'a Temple in Haifa, and the old city of Acre.

During our tour of Hadassah Medical Center we met with several physicians, including Dr. Rifat Jabara, Director of Cardiology and head of the cardiac cath lab. Dr. Jabara had done two years of research in Atlanta, and at that time became friends with Dr. Paul Scheinberg, one of the physicians on our trip. Paul spoke highly of Dr. Jabara, as did our hospital guide, an Israeli physician in an administrative position at Hadassah.



We asked the Israeli doctor about any potential conflicts of Jews working with Arabs in the hospital. “None,” he replied, without hesitation. “We leave politics at the door. A large number of our physicians are Arabs. No problem. They treat Jews and non-Jews alike, as do all the Jewish doctors.” This may sound pollyannish, but it’s true. Professionals from both religions respect one another, and work well together.

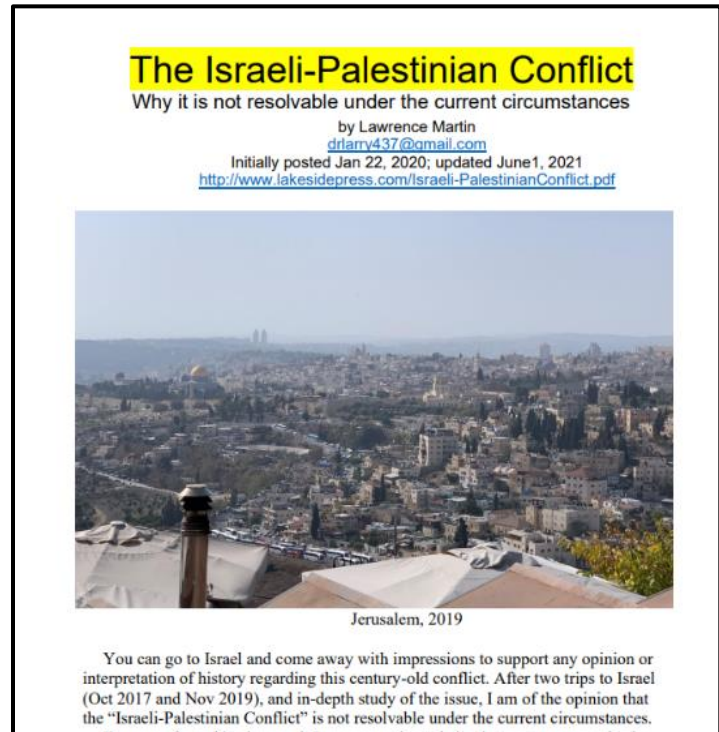
The above paragraphs were written before the October 7, 2023 Hamas massacre of Israelis and ensuing Gaza war. This event is further discussed in the chapter, “From the River to the Sea.”

NOTE: Writing at the end of 2023, it is apparent that the Hamas massacre and ensuing war has changed many perceptions of the Arab-Jewish conflict in the Holy Land. The next three chapters were all crafted before October 7, 2023, and can be viewed as background for what ensued.

The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

From the two pre-Covid trips to Israel, plus reading many tomes and articles about the country's history I developed a clear perspective of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. I wanted to communicate my perspective to others, and composed a long, detailed essay, titled "The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Why it is not resolvable under the current circumstances." I first posted it on the internet January 2020, two months after our trip with JNF; it has since been updated.
<http://www.lakesidepress.com/Israeli-PalestinianConflict.pdf>

I've also had opportunity to present a slide show on this information to discussion groups in The Villages.



The website is in seven sections. No need to go to this website unless you want all the references and documentation. I will summarize each section below. Keep in mind the overarching theme: Why the I-P Conflict is not resolvable under current circumstances.

I. The Arabs Want All the Land, from the River to the Sea

The Palestinians, or perhaps more accurately their political and thought leaders – no matter from what era – do not want to co-exist with Israel. They want all the land, not just the West Bank, or the West Bank and East Jerusalem. They want the whole place, all the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. Their fighting motto is “from the river to the sea.” Total elimination of Israel as the primary goal has been espoused so often, by so many Arab leaders, that one could fill several books with just their quotes.

II. Seven More Reasons the Conflict is Not Resolvable

- 1-Israeli skepticism
- 2-The refugee situation
- 3-Palestinian children taught to hate the Jews

- 4-Corruption and hypocrisy dominate the Palestinian leadership
- 5-Terrorist organizations set the narrative
- 6-Moderate Palestinian leaders risk assassination
- 7-One-state solution is a no-state solution

III. Progressive American Jews: Well-meaning but naïve?

Definitely. (I also created a separate, even more detailed website on this aspect: <http://www.lakesidepress.com/JewsWhoBlameIsrael.pdf>)

IV. American Politics as a Determining Factor

Calling out politicians who support the BDS movement, which seeks nothing less than the destruction of Israel.

V. Anti-Zionism vs. anti-Semitism

Alan Dershowitz's 3-D definition of anti-Semitism shows that the two "anti's" usually go hand-in-hand.

VI. Irreconcilable views

Both sides' views are laid out. They are irreconcilable.

VII. The Solution As I See It: A Radical Change in the World Order

Includes a change in Iranian and Palestinian leadership, and elimination of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)

I have no illusions about this topic. I know full well the views opposite of mine, the passion behind those opinions, and that nothing I say or write is going to change the view of people who want Israel eliminated, whether they express this wish overtly, or hide it under the guise of supporting BDS or criticizing Israel as "Apartheid," which is just word-game propaganda based on zero reality. While not inconceivable, my essays are also unlikely to change the views of progressives (Jews and non-Jews) whose platitudinous values ("equality", "fairness," "opportunity") blind them to history and reality.

Which brings me to three pro-Israel writers.

Three Pro-Israel Writers

In creating websites about Israel* – our trips there, the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, and the bias of the left-wing media – I read many books and articles. Three authors in particular caught my attention for their clear prose in pointing out the hypocrisy, double standards, and disinformation of the boycott, divestiture, and sanctions (BDS) movement, and other platforms that seek to delegitimize Israel.

Propagandists whose goal is to destroy Israel use insane terms like “apartheid,” “genocide,” and “Nazi” to describe the only democracy in the Middle East, and the only one that tolerates all religions. Life for citizens of Israel is free and open, in marked contrast to all other Middle East countries, which range from autocratic to outright dictatorships, without equal rights for women, and without free speech or a free press. Anyone who has been to Israel, or studied its history, knows the propaganda labels applied to the country and its policies are Orwellian, the polar opposite of reality.

The three authors profiled here show just how the propagandists work to convince people Israel is evil and the root cause of all the conflict in the region. Dershowitz, Tishby, and Melman lay bare the true goal of BDS, and of those who espouse criticism only for Israel, while ignoring real human rights violations in other countries. That goal? Eliminate all Jews “from the river to the sea.”

*

<http://www.lakesidepress.com/IsraelTrip.html>

<http://www.lakesidepress.com/Israeli-PalestinianConflict.pdf>

<http://www.lakesidepress.com/JewsWhoBlameIsrael.pdf>

<http://www.lakesidepress.com/NYTBiasAgainstIsrael.pdf>

Alan Dershowitz (b. 1938)

Attorney and Harvard Emeritus Professor Alan Dershowitz has been front and center in publicizing (and debating) the extreme anti-Israel views of Jewish intellectuals. Although a brilliant legal mind and prolific writer, his pro-Israel books and articles come with some “baggage,” making him a pariah to many Jews who are supporters of Israel.

Why is this? Mainly because he has also written books and articles defending President Trump’s legal positions, including arguing in the Senate against impeachment on constitutional grounds. Though he is quick to point out that he also argued against the impeachment of President Clinton, and considers himself “non-partisan,” progressives and never-Trumpers are appalled by his position.

It also hasn't helped that Dershowitz was on the legal team for O.J. Simpson and convicted (now deceased) pedophile Jeffrey Epstein. He announced in 2022 that he is also working on behalf of Trump supporter Mike Lindell, representing him in his lawsuit against the Justice Department over the search and seizure of his telephone. In a September 22, 2022 WSJ article about his work on the Lindell case, Dershowitz wrote:

I disagree with My Pillow founder Mike Lindell about a lot of things, including his belief that the 2020 election was stolen from Donald Trump. I'm a liberal Democrat; he is a conservative Republican. Yet I am enthusiastically representing him in his lawsuit against the Justice Department and Federal Bureau of Investigation over the recent search and seizure of his telephone...It is important for Democrats who support Joe Biden's legitimate presidency and object to Mr. Trump's violations of constitutional norms to resist unconstitutional efforts by Mr. Biden's administration and supporters to abuse the law, particularly the criminal-justice system, against our political opponents.

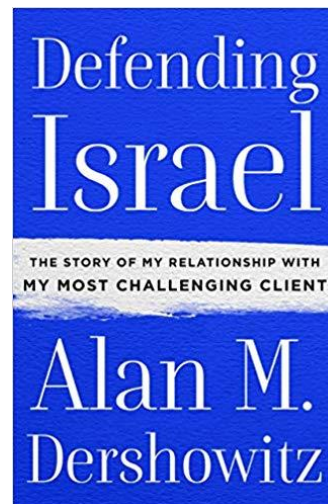
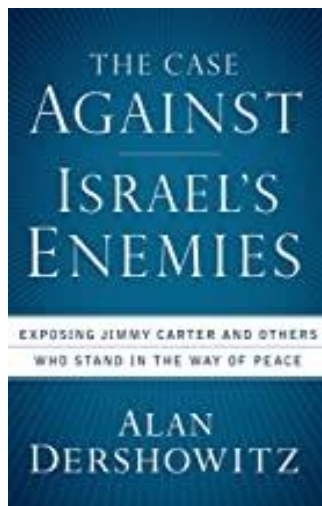
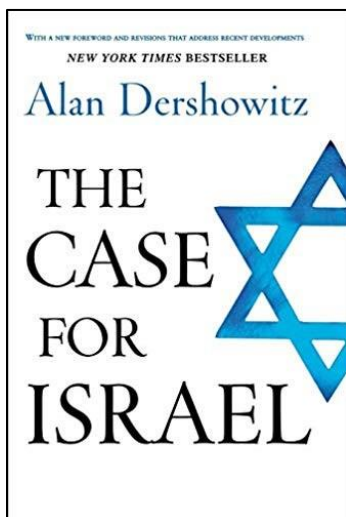
<https://www.wsj.com/articles/why-i-joined-mike-lindells-legal-team-dershowitz-cellphone-2020-election-justice-system-search-warrant-fbi-constitution-11663854991?page=1>

For many American Jews, Dershowitz's choice of clients cancels out his pro-Israel writing, and as result they denigrate or simply ignore his views on the country. "Don't quote me Dershowitz!" is a typical response I hear from progressive Jews when I bring up his books about Israel.

Yet in creating my website about the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, I found Dershowitz's books invaluable. They are clearly written, the arguments presented cogently. He nicely eviscerates the illogic and hypocrisy of intellectuals who condemn Israel with outright fabrication and revisionist history.

To ignore Dershowitz's writing on the subject, or worse to denigrate it because he gives legal support to people you don't like, is simply being close-minded. You may not like the messenger, but the message is worth listening to. I was personally appalled when Dershowitz signed on the defense team of O.J. Simpson because, to me, OJ was guilty of murder and there were already competent defense lawyers on the case. At the time Dershowitz's move seemed like nothing more than grandstanding, publicity-seeking. But that negative view didn't keep me from reading his books about Israel and citing them in my website on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. No one writes more clearly about the hypocrisy and double standards Israel has to put up with than Alan Dershowitz.

In 2004 he published *The Case for Israel*, which was a New York Times Bestseller. He followed that up in 2008 with *The Case Against Israel's Enemies*. Then in 2019, he published *Defending Israel*. He calls Israel his "most challenging client."



<https://www.amazon.com/Case-Israel-Alan-Dershowitz/dp/0471679526/>

<https://www.amazon.com/Case-Against-Israels-Enemies-Exposing/dp/0470379928/>

<https://www.amazon.com/Defending-Israel-Relationship-Challenging-Client/dp/1250179963/>

In *Defending Israel*, he discusses the “3-D’s” that define anti-Semitism. (They originated with Russian refusenik Anatoly Sharansky; published in *Jewish Political Studies Review* 16:3-4, 2004).

- Demonization – when the critic makes absurd comparisons, as comparing Israeli treatment of Palestinians to Nazi treatment of Jews, or comparing Israel’s treatment of its Arab citizens to South Africa’s apartheid policy against blacks – that is blatant anti-Semitism. It is simply lying about reality to demonize one nation, and only one nation.
- Double Standards – When criticism is applied selectively to Israel, such as blaming Israel for human rights abuses while ignoring countries with far worse human rights issues like China, Iran, Cuba, Syria and Venezuela.
- Delegitimization – When Israel’s fundamental right to exist is denied, alone among all peoples of the world.

He points out that criticizing Israel is not by definition anti-Semitic, but “singling out Israel for opprobrium and international sanction – out of all proportion to any other party in the Middle East – is anti-Semitic, and not saying so is dishonest.”

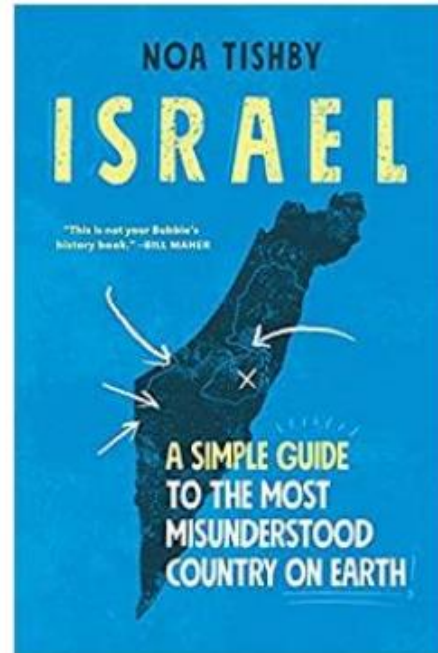
Notwithstanding Dershowitz’s great writing about Israel, I was in need of another source to recommend about the I-P Conflict, ideally one by an Israeli progressive. Thus, I was happy to come upon a new book by an Israeli woman who has all the liberal credentials, Noa Tishby.

Noa Tishby (b. 1977)

I had never heard of Noa Tishby until her book about Israel came out in early 2021. I then learned that she is “an Israeli actress, writer, producer, and activist,” and that she has appeared in American television shows and movies, including *The Affair*, *The Island*, *Nip/Tuck*, *Big Love*, *NCIS*. She was also co-executive producer of the HBO series, *In Treatment*.

“She produced *In Treatment*?” exclaimed Ruth, when I read her this fact. “I watched that show. It was great.”

Now Tishby had two new fans. I ordered the book and we both read it within days of arrival. What a great book! Here is an admitted progressive who understands the history, understands the reality of Israel today, and has a common-sense perspective. Maybe, just maybe, people who refuse to read Alan Dershowitz’s pro-Israel books (because he argued against Trump’s impeachment on Constitutional grounds) will read Tishby and thereby gain some insight into the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.



Here are two passages from her book. The first one includes a quote by Israeli Ambassador to the UN, Abba Eban.

I am not for a second dismissing the pain that war and displacement has caused the Arabs. However, it is infuriating to see over and over again history being twisted into a perceived underdog story. Palestinians and their supporters, including many on the American left, some of whom are my close friends, use the word *nakba* to describe a disaster that just happened to the Palestinians, like some natural disaster, a hurricane, or, dare I say, a premeditated holocaust. One that was inflicted upon a nation out of the blue and without any provocation. But that day, which was indeed disastrous for Arab Palestinians, Syrians, Iraqis, Egyptians, and their allies, was not an act of God. It was a military and political defeat that was the result of bad choices made by bad Arab leaders.

Israeli ambassador to the United Nations Abba Eban described it best when he addressed the UN on November 17, 1958:

“The Arab refugee problem was caused by a war of aggression, launched by the Arab states against Israel in 1947 and 1948. Let there be no mistake. If there had been no war against Israel, with its consequent harvest of bloodshed, misery, panic and flight, there would be no problem of Arab refugees today. Once you determine the responsibility for that war, you have determined the responsibility for the refugee problem. Nothing in the

history of our generation is clearer or less controversial than the initiative of Arab governments for the conflict out of which the refugee tragedy emerged. The historic origins of that conflict are clearly defined by the confessions of Arab governments themselves. “This will be a war of extermination,” declare the Secretary-General of the Arab League speaking for the governments of six Arab states. “It will be a momentous massacre to be spoken of like the Mongolian massacre and the Crusades.”



The Palestinian cause is full of pain; however the Nakba is a branded term, used to attribute victimhood and heroism to a loss in a war that was initiated by the same losing side. If the Arabs had agreed to the United Nations Partition Plan, no war would have happened, no Nakba would have happened, and maybe we would have been living in peace ever since.

But they didn't. [p. 115-116]

“In only about fifteen years or so, BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) managed to become pretty successful in altering the conversation about Israel, infiltrating liberal circles, and becoming a hip extracurricular activity for my friends in the woke crowd. BDS has had incredible success reaching young Americans, who then become extremely active on college campuses and later on, in all walks of life, convincing those young Americans that they are only after justice for all.

“This couldn't be further from reality. A dive into the movement reveals a well-coordinated manipulation of American public opinion. BDS is not what it appears to be, and many people behind the BDS movement are working hard to make sure unsuspecting and well-meaning people stay in the dark. “...Let me be clear: BDS is not a movement for justice or peace. The movement doesn't offer any solutions for peace anywhere. BDS leaders try not to say it out loud this way, of course, but it's very easy to see, once you take a look...” [p. 198-199]

In 2022, Tishby was appointed by Foreign Minister Yair Lapid as Special Envoy for Combating Antisemitism and the Delegitimization of Israel. In his April 11, 2022 twitter feed, Lapid included a brief video with his announcement of the appointment.

“I'm proud to name Noa Tishby as the first ever Special Envoy for Combating Antisemitism & the Delegitimization of Israel. In this new role, Noa will be a powerful voice in the fight against the rising tide of hate directed at Jews and the State of Israel.”

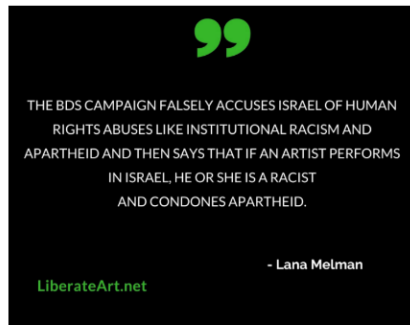
In April 2023, Ms. Tishby was fired from this position by Prime Minister Netanyahu, after she spoke out against the judicial reform proposed by his government.

Lana Melman

Lana Melman is an entertainment industry attorney who has been fighting the cultural boycott of performing artists since 2011. In her 2022 book *Artists Under Fire: The BDS War Against Celebrities, Jews, and Israel*, she shows how the BDS movement works to keep artists from performing in Israel – through lies, intimidation, and in some cases threat of physical violence. I had the opportunity to meet Ms. Melman, and learn about her book, when she spoke in The Villages January 8, 2023.



Her website is
<https://www.liberateart.net/lanamelman>

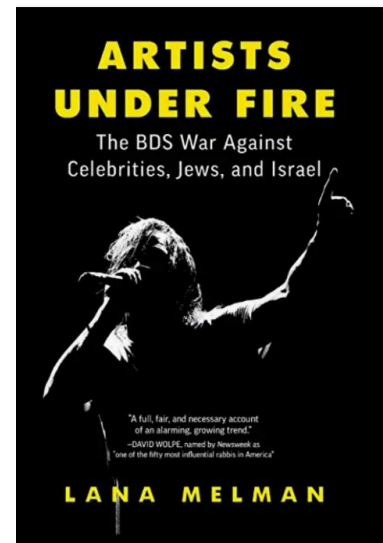


Here is an excerpt from her book.

BDS entangles the ideas of the bad Jew and the bad Israeli and provides artists — and others — with the language and ideas of classic antisemitism when it criticizes the Jewish state. When BDS proponents or others vilify Israelis, they are not referring to the Arab citizens who make up 20 percent of the population; they are talking about the Jews.

While artists such as Jon Stewart, Halsey, John Oliver, Mia Farrow, Viola Davis, and Mark Ruffalo do not (to date) explicitly call for a cultural boycott of Israel, they till the soil for the BDS campaign by demonizing Israel. I refer to these anti-Zionist artists as “Israel Bashers.” While some of them would strongly deny their thoughts or hearts are antisemitic, to me, their comments clearly are. As you will see, anti-Zionism among artists is not black and white; it comes in shades of gray.

Some Israel Bashers do not make any attempt to disguise their contempt for the Jewish homeland. Examples, in my opinion, include fashion icons Gigi and Bella Hadid, whose father is a wealthy Beverly Hills hotelier of Palestinian descent, and English singer Dua Lipa, who is dating Gigi’s and Bella’s brother Anwar Hadid. When the Hadid sisters, with their combined Instagram reach of 119 million followers (a number that dwarfs Israel’s 6.6 million Jews), disseminate disinformation about the Jewish homeland, it has a significant impact on the perception of Israel around the world.



Although some Israel Bashers believe their condemnation of Israel is unbiased criticism, it lacks balance and objectivity. There is no sign of empathy for the suffering of innocent Israelis or any criticism of Hamas' goal to destroy the Jewish state or the militant organization's reign of terror on both Israelis and its own people.

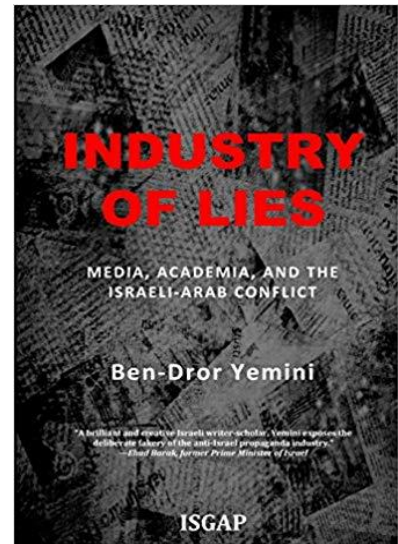
These artists are entitled to their opinions, but as public figures with outsized microphones, they have an obligation to get the story straight. If they spent thirty minutes reading Hamas's charter, with its pledge to destroy Israel, or researching how it treats homosexuals and regards women and contrasted that to the rights of gay people, women, and minorities in Israel, they might be moved to treat all the players with a fair hand.

These three authors help expose the lies and hypocrisy of the BDS movement, and of critics whose true goal is not justice or peaceful co-existence, but the complete destruction of Israel. Their books are not for the confirmed anti-Semite who wants Israel erased from the Earth; no facts, no information, no argument will change this inborn hatred. Instead, these books – and, by extension, my websites – are for people who potentially have an open mind, but who are largely ignorant of the reality of BDS and also the history of the century-old Arab-Jewish conflict.

BDS is just one slice of the I-P conflict. There are dozens of books dealing with the larger picture. You can categorize them as “pro-Palestinian,” “pro-Israel,” and “trying like hell to be neutral.” Regarding media and academic bias pointed out by the above three authors, the most definitive book I've read is *Industry of Lies*, by Ben-Dror Yemini. Highly recommended to anyone with an open mind about the I-P conflict. Among the Amazon testimonies for this book is this one:

“I am going to do something unconventional: recommend a book that excoriates me. Ben-Dror Yemini and I have some fundamental differences of opinion. And yet, I think his new book on the global rise of anti-Israeli propaganda is important, thorough, and thought-provoking. For too long, too many good people have been swayed by the derisive campaign that describes the Jewish-democratic state in a distorted, pernicious manner. *Industry of Lies* offers a robust rebuttal to this campaign. It undercuts the basic arguments of BDS supporters and those who see Zionism as monstrous. Yemini opens the door to a much-needed, balanced, and fair discussion of Israel's achievements and failures.”

-Ari Shavit, journalist and author of *My Promised Land*



Writing about Writing

“Writing is something that you can never do as well as it can be done.”
-- Ernest Hemingway

After I joined critique groups in retirement, I started writing short pieces about the craft of writing. These are either essays or vignettes designed to make a point. They are posted on the internet; one of them, “Pour Out Your Words,” is included in [Appendix D](#).

I have no intention to write a nonfiction book about the craft of writing. For one thing, I’m not qualified. My knowledge about the “rules of writing” is piecemeal, with no formal education in the craft. I wrote these short articles to instill a little humor and irony while making a few specific points gleaned from experience. A key point from each article is included below. For “The Critique Club” I provide an excerpt.

Nonfiction Writing Mistake: Not Telling the Reader What’s on Your Mind

<https://drlarry437.medium.com/another-nonfiction-writing-mistake-not-telling-the-reader-whats-in-your-mind-1be2011263eb>

The problem with mind-trapped information is partly psychological, in that vital information *envisioned* in the mind (dates, ages, physical descriptions of people and things, locations, etc.) becomes entwined with what we actually write, so that the omissions are not recognized. At the moment of literary creation, it *seems* as if all the important information is being conveyed, when it is not.

Pour Out Your Words. Then Revise, Rewrite.

<https://drlarry437.medium.com/pour-out-your-words-then-revise-rewrite-6f8a50717a2c>

Bronze award winner in Florida Writers Association’s Royal Palm Literary Awards competition for 2020, category “blog posts.” This post advocates writing as a “pantser” rather than a “plotter.” The complete article is in [Appendix D](#).

How *Not* to Write Medical Scenes in Fiction

<https://drlarry437.medium.com/how-not-to-write-medical-scenes-in-fiction-ced87e7dea0f/>

If you want to write medical scenes, you have two choices. Make them realistic, so they don’t stop the reader. Otherwise, major deviations (e.g., an unprofessional psychiatrist, a stupid nurse, a doctor practicing beyond his training), should be integral to how you plan to develop your story. Unrealism is okay if you can show the reader you know what you’re doing, and the deviation makes sense. Otherwise, not recommended.

Examples are discussed in the next chapter, Critique Clubs – Part 1. An abbreviated version of this article was published by Chicago’s Off Campus Writers Workshop in February 2023; see <https://ocww.info/About-Write?p=writing-medical-scenes-a-doctors-advice>.

“That’s that, Professor.”

<https://drlarry437.medium.com/thats-that-1dfad3f4d59e/>

A college professor cautions his students against excessive use of “that” in their writing, but the students find the word used quite a bit by Ernest Hemingway, Jane Austen, and Arthur Conan Doyle. The professor bristles at this information, states his caution is for today, nor for writing a hundred years ago. The students don’t seem impressed. He asks for questions. Seeing none, one of the students says to the class, “Well, I guess that’s that.”

The Dichotomy of Verisimilitude between Books and Movies.

<https://drlarry437.medium.com/the-dichotomy-of-verisimilitude-between-books-and-movies-e5dcca776868>

You can get away with things in movies that would sink your novel, or at least be severely criticized. For a good example, from the movie “Some Like it Hot,” see Critique Clubs – Part 1.

Who is *he*?

<https://drlarry437.medium.com/who-is-he-36388d7d6a13>

Pronoun confusion is a common problem. In the passage below, who is “he”?

After the cards were dealt, both John and Bill put on a poker face, John with two aces, Bill with two pairs. He placed the first bet.

The Critique Club

<https://drlarry437.medium.com/the-critique-club-c9e002008ed5>

This short story was a finalist in the RPLA competition. It is told in first person by a club member, Jordan. In a meeting, Jordan reads the first part of “his” short story, and is pilloried for bad writing. The members point out his use of passive voice, the no-no of an alternating point of view, excessive repetition of words like “that” and “it,” and other issues. After all this criticism, club member Brian tells Jordan, “You can’t hope to get it published in this style of writing.” Here is the ending from that point.

“Oh, I’m not worried about that, Brian. It’s already been published.”

“Oh? Where?”

“I have a confession to make. It’s not really my story. The actual title is “To Build a Fire,” and it was published in 1908 by Jack London. The only thing I changed is the title. It is still being read in high schools and is widely regarded as a classic man-versus-nature short story.” I pause for effect. “A classic.”

There are a few guffaws as people stare at their copy. I see Brian doing a fast web search on his smartphone. While he’s searching, I take another sip of coffee, and then Mike speaks up.

“You can probably do this with a lot of older literature,” says Mike. “Imagine reading *Beowulf* here. This critique group is really for what we ourselves write, not fiction written by others, no matter how famous they may be.” He looks to Samantha, as if hoping she will reinforce his disdain for my trickery, but she stays mum.

Brian puts down his smart phone. “Okay, I found ‘To Build a Fire’. It popped up in a web site ‘Twenty Great American Short Stories’. So you fooled us, I admit. But I agree with Mike. The criticisms are still valid for modern writing. Styles change, and what’s considered good writing changes over time.”

“I suppose so,” I reply. “Just thought it would be interesting to see how we respond to what’s generally considered great literature, even today. As I said, the story’s read in schools across the country.”

“So is *Beowulf*,” says Mike, fairly dripping with sarcasm. Brian slowly shakes his head, and Alice pointedly does not make eye contact. Still, I have no regrets. I made my point, and offer no more rebuttal.

“Let’s move on,” Samantha says. “Who’s next to read?”

Critique Clubs – Part 1

Critique clubs or groups are an excellent way to get feedback and have helped me immensely. So many errors can crop up in your writing, and you won't know it without some feedback. The *Gravity* picture book was my most egregious mistake, but there have many lesser gaffes.

In one critique club session I read part of my third Civil War novel, *Liberty Street: A Novel of Late Civil War Savannah*. In this scene, the heroine is making tea for her lover.

“The tea is ready.” She poured the boiling water over tea bags in the cups, and handed one to him.

As soon as I finished the reading one member said, “Larry, I don't think they had tea bags in 1864.”

I looked it up. He was right! Tea bags weren't available until 1903. When you write historical fiction, it's okay to create new characters and invent dialogue, but not okay to misstate basic facts out of ignorance.

Here's another item that caught me by surprise. In my novella about travel to Mars, the spaceship crew begins a toast to their long voyage. The trip commander states:

“We will celebrate with a bottle of California's finest champagne. We cannot use glasses like on Earth, so I will pour out some and we will try to swallow the liquid before it floats away.”

After reading that scene I was quickly set straight. “Larry, Champagne is only from France. There's no such thing as California Champagne. Choose a different toast.”

Oh? I didn't know. I changed the line, to “...bottle of California's finest sparkling wine.”

Everyone makes these kinds of mistakes, and we point them out to each other. When one club member read a story that mentioned a doctor giving penicillin to a patient in the 1930s, I explained that penicillin wasn't available until the 1940s. The reader was grateful for my correction.

Here is an example from my blog post, “How *Not* to Write Medical Scenes in Fiction.”
<https://drlarry437.medium.com/how-not-to-write-medical-scenes-in-fiction-ced87e7dea0f/>

Backstory

Dirk McGirt tried to kill his business rival Sam Simpson in New York City. Despite being shot with three bullets, Simpson lived. After life-saving surgery, Simpson is transferred to the hospital's ICU, in “critical condition.” McGirt reads this information in the next day's newspaper and agitates over how to finish the

job, worried about being implicated if his victim survives to talk to the cops. McGirt calls the hospital to check on Simpson's status. He is transferred to the ICU, where a nurse picks up.

Scene

"Hello, can I help you?"

"Yes, this is George Simpson, Sam Simpson's brother. I'm in Chicago and just learned my brother is in the hospital, in intensive care. What is his status? Is he going to make it?"

"So far, your brother is stable," she replies. "He's on life support, but the doctors think he'll pull through."

"Life support?"

"Yes, a mechanical ventilator breathes for him. We're hoping he can get off the machine in a couple days. Will you travel here to see him?"

"I'll be there tomorrow. When are visiting hours?"

Critique

It's not realistic, given the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), common knowledge among all health care workers. Medical information is *not* divulged to strangers, and certainly not over the phone. Assuming the nurse is not in on the plot to kill Simpson (which she is not), it's a mistake that weakens the developing story.

Here is another medical error, one not so obvious but nonetheless significant. In the story, a male patient is being counseled by his female psychiatrist. After the session they both stand, and she gives him a big hug, with words of encouragement.

Not realistic. For this action on the part of the psychiatrist to be plausible, it would have to be explained in some way. Either she's a fraud, a looney tune, or they are having an affair, all plausible plot points. But none of those characterizations were built into the story; the author meant her to be just a normal psychiatrist. That is not how a normal psychiatrist behaves. (My wife, a psychiatrist, assured me of this point.)

My advice in writing medical scenes in fiction: be realistic. If you want to be unrealistic, that's okay, but unrealistic actions need to be explained, made part of the character's persona or the plot. You can give penicillin to a patient in the 1930s, just get it there via a time machine.

Then there are the movies. While streaming movies during Covid, I became aware of how common it is for them to mess up facts and get away with it. You can't get away with it in writing fiction, at least not if you seek feedback from a good critique group. But in movie after movie, I found that facts don't matter, you can make stuff up. One of many examples I found is in the Netflix series "Away." A space crew is on their way to Mars. Millions of miles from Earth, the spaceship commander speaks to her daughter back on Earth *without any delay in transmission*. Not possible. If I read that in my critique group I would be slammed.

In another Netflix series, “The Politician,” a high school student who thinks she has cancer has blood drawn for testing, and later is told “the blood test shows you have no cancer.” Nonsense, medically. No such test. If someone read this in our group, I’d be all over it.

From binge watching movies during Covid, I came across many more examples, to the point I decided to write about this difference between books and movies. The result was the purposely highfalutin-titled blog-post, “The Dichotomy of Verisimilitude between Books and Movies.” <https://drlarry437.medium.com/the-dichotomy-of-verisimilitude-between-books-and-movies-e5dcca776868>. My favorite example in this essay is from a famous 1959 movie. Imagine someone reading this bit of narration in a writing critique group.

On Miami Beach, Marilyn Monroe approaches Tony Curtis, who is sitting in a beach chair. They banter a bit, clearly charmed by each other. In the distance, beachgoers are frolicking in the surf, and across the bay, clouds hang close to the low mountains.

About that paragraph, the writer is hit with a question.

“Uh, excuse me, you said this was Miami Beach?”

“Yes. Why?”

“There are no mountains anywhere near Miami Beach.”

Oh? See the 1959 film “Some Like it Hot,” starring Curtis and Monroe. Repeatedly, in the movie we are told the setting is Miami Beach. But of course, it was filmed at San Diego’s Hotel Coronado, with the backdrop being the rugged Point Loma peninsula across the bay (see screen shot of beach scene, below). No one complained back then (as far as I know). But don’t write this in your book. There is a dichotomy of verisimilitude...

<https://coronadovisitorcenter.com/some-like-it-hot-hotel/>



Not Miami Beach

Now for some of the more common issues encountered in critique group readings. I divide them into two broad categories: Should Revise and Must Revise.

Should Revise. Writing that is grammatically and syntactically correct, but calls attention to itself, making the reading tedious and obstructing the story flow. Common reasons are excess use of prepositions, pronouns, and/or adverbs; and excessive use of passive voice. Examples:

Excess prepositions: In the building, out of the rain, I placed the coins into the designated box, out of which spewed the ticket into my hand.

Suggested change. Inside, now free of the rain, I bought my tickets from the automated box.

Excess pronouns: **He** passed many fast-food joints, none of which interested **him**, until **he** came upon the one **he** was looking for.

Suggested change: He passed many fast-food joints until he found the one he wanted.

Passive voice. He walked into the room and was shocked by what he saw; the painting was defiled with soot and the frame was all askew.

Excessive use of “was” is the problem. Suggested change: He walked into the room and gasped at the mutilated picture: soot splattered over the paint and the frame all askew.

Must Revise. This is the case if the writing is hopelessly confusing to the reader, is grammatically screwed up, or does not convey the author’s intent. Examples:

Dwight was attacked as soon as **he** entered the door. **He** could not see the attacker’s face, only felt the pummeling of fists into **his** abdomen. **He** doubled over in pain, but was able to turn around, then saw **his** foe was Alvin. **He** pivoted left to avoid another blow, then kicked hard, hitting **Alvin**. Then came more blows and counterpunches, until **he** fell to the ground.

In this example, who “fell to the ground”? It’s unclear due to pronoun confusion.

“After removing the table from the car, Jack sold it.”

Did Jack sell the car or the table? Unclear, so needs revision.

In a 1500-word first chapter of a memoir, the author mentioned he went on a trip with Barbara, but never stated who Barbara was. When questioned after the reading, he replied, “Oh, she’s my wife.” That information was in his head, but not conveyed to the reader.

For more on this common mistake, see <https://drlarry437.medium.com/another-nonfiction-writing-mistake-not-telling-the-reader-whats-in-your-mind-1be2011263eb>

Wrong word choice.

During the king’s rein there were incessant wars.

Should be “reign.”

Through the telescope he honed in on Venus.

“Hone” is to sharpen; should be “homed” in.

On January 6th they stormed the capital.

Should be “capitol,” as it refers to the building, not the city.

Missing comma:

Nathan held up his glass. “Let’s drink Carol.”

Without a comma after drink, it reads that Nathan wants to drink Carol.

I met up with my sister Jill and Jane.

Is the sister named “Jill and Jane”? For clarity, need a comma before and after Jill.

Common mistakes are common. We all make them. Have your writing critiqued by other writers before publishing.

Critique Clubs – Part 2

In my first four years of retirement, I tried out four different critique clubs in The Villages, before landing in the one I'm in now. The other three served their purpose for a while, but for various reasons, I quit them. One did not give out printed copies, so when the author read his or her piece, it was often hard to follow the dialogue, to know just which character was speaking. Another group required that someone else read the author's work, not good (for me) since the reader didn't emphasize passages as I intended. Yet another group spent way too much time on each author, and it became tedious after a while; it also meant you didn't get to read every week – more like every three or four weeks.

The club I ended up with – called Wannabes, as in wannabe writers – gives each reader twenty minutes to read and receive critique. You read for about ten minutes (1500-2000 words) and then get verbal feedback. Half the group consists of published, experienced authors. This club also requires copies be emailed out ahead of each weekly meeting, so after you read out loud and receive oral comments, you then get your printed copies back with written comments. Altogether the best feedback of any of the groups I've joined.

What should you not expect from a critique group?

The previous chapter discussed some common and less common writing errors. The mistakes are easy to point out from the examples provided. But what about the larger picture, the whole story as it were, the arc of the book? Does it flow, does it make sense, does it come together? Such larger questions are difficult to answer in most critique groups, where only about 2000 words are read every week, and we may not remember what was read the previous week, let alone months earlier.

For feedback about the whole book, authors have several options, not available in a typical critique group. One is to hire a “developmental editor,” a professional who will read the work, advise on how your story unfolds, and make recommendations for major change if needed. Some authors use professional editors for both story development and “line editing,” in which word choice and syntax are also critiqued. Editing for these purposes is expensive, and many self-published authors forego it.

Another option is “beta” readers, typically non-professionals who will read your completed work from the standpoint of a general reader: not to nitpick mistakes such as discussed in the last chapter, but to give general feedback on the story. They may do it free, or ask for an exchange: they read your book and you read theirs. You can seek out beta readers online, starting with the popular website goodreads.com.

A third option, the least recommended but probably better than nothing, is to have a friend or relative read your book, preferably someone who is also a writer.

What can you expect from a critique group?

Assume you find a good fit, feel comfortable with your group, and get feedback on a regular basis, what can you expect? Here I'll quote Stephen King. After giving specific advice on the tools a writer needs, and how to go about using them, he wrote:

While it is impossible to make a competent writer out of a bad writer, and while it is equally impossible to make a great writer out of a good one, it is possible, with a lot of hard work, dedication, and timely help, to make a good writer out of a merely competent one. (p. 142, *On Writing*).

That's what you can expect from a critique group. If you're bad – because you can't write good grammar, can't compose a coherent narrative, can't keep your characters straight, can't separate reality from fantasy – you're not going to improve in a weekly critique group. And if you're good, say you get published and people read your work, you won't rise to the level of Dickens, Dostoevsky, or Melville by attending a critique group.

But, if you are merely competent – have none of the defects of a bad writer – and strive to learn about the rules of writing, accept feedback and the necessity of rewriting to improve your work, a critique group can, over time, turn you into a good writer. I've seen it happen.

Now, here comes a huge caveat. A lot of the critiques received in writing groups aren't helpful. They mess with your writing voice, or point out things just to be picky but that don't need changing, or suggest a plot change you don't like. Overall, I end up accepting about half the suggestions made in my critique group.

You should not change your words unless you agree with the change.

The best recommendations I receive give me an 'ah ha' moment. *Why didn't I think of that? Of course, that suggestion makes it read better.* Then I readily make the change.

Ultimately, you have to live with what you write and submit for publication. It should be a hundred percent your work, not a mishmash of others' ideas.

Do all authors want feedback?

Established writers who have no trouble getting published will welcome feedback from the publisher's editor, although how it is received will depend on many variables, including the author's past experience with the editor, the specific suggestions made, etc. In any case, I doubt many (any?) established writers bother with critique groups such as I describe in these two chapters.

Isaac Asimov expressed his disdain for critiques in a book he co-authored with his wife, quoted below.

Certainly *I* don't welcome criticism from any fellow writer, however qualified he might be to offer such comments. Nor do I make much distinction between "constructive criticism" and any other kind. I find no criticism to be

constructive...Nor is there any use in having any writer say, “No, I think you stumbled at this point. What you should really have your character do is thus-and-so.”

After all, my mind works in a certain way, and other minds work in other ways. I don’t say that my mind-working is better, but it *is* mine. Another’s suggestions just doesn’t fit my way of thinking.

Naturally, I must listen to editors and I must even sometimes follow their suggestions...but it would be ridiculous actually to invite criticism from someone who is not your editor when you can just as easily refrain from breathing a word about what you’re doing. (*How to Enjoy Writing*, 1987; page 140)

You can’t argue this point with Asimov, a genius writer. You can argue with a different breed – bad writers who believe they are good, and don’t take well to criticism. A smart relative, with advanced degrees, once sent me a short story about his college days. I gave a solid critique, as I would to any member of my club, pointing out many things wrong with the story and offering suggestions on how to improve it. He was not pleased, as he expected praise, and said I simply didn’t appreciate the essence of his piece. On further discussion he admitted it was a draft, one that he wrote quickly. Yet his inability to accept the critique clashed with his self-perception of being an excellent writer, even on a first draft. To my knowledge, he has never sought feedback from a critique group or unrelated fellow authors, and his writing shows.

Asimov’s method is certainly not recommended for beginning writers, or writers who plan to self-publish. That description covers almost all the writers in The Villages, and perhaps the vast majority of active writers across the country.

In writing groups registered with The Villages, all residents are welcomed to join. All you have to do is show up and agree to whatever rules the group has set. In the groups I’ve been in, occasionally a new resident would come in, read his or her piece and then, after receiving constructive comments, never return. In each instance, the writing needed a lot of work. My impression is that the critiques offered were not welcomed. It takes a thick skin, and some humility, to accept valid criticism.

Unless you’re an established, published writer, join a critique group. It can meet in-person or online. They’re everywhere and easy to find. Google “writing critique groups near me.” Don’t rely on relatives or close friends to critique your work; they may not be completely honest with you.

For beginners, learning to write is a learning curve, sometimes steep. You have to be open to criticism, willing to rewrite, make changes, and learn about the craft.

Ambrose Bierce (b. 1842 – d. 1913 or 1914)

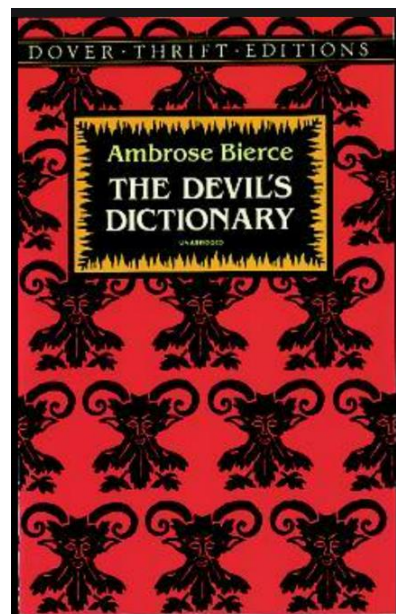
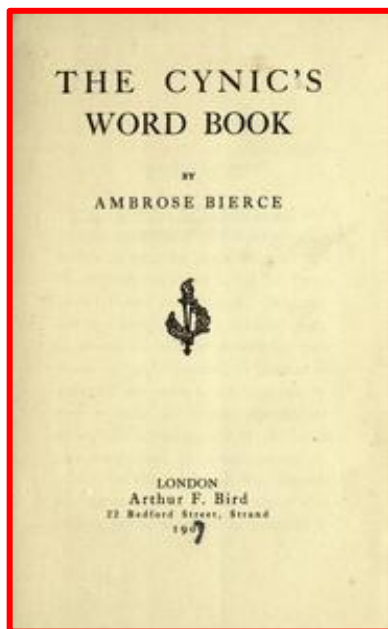
It has never been determined just when or where Ambrose Bierce died. In December 1913 he was a 71-year-old famous journalist and short story author. Reportedly bored with life at that point, he traveled from his home in Washington, D.C., to El Paso, then entered Mexico to join Pancho Villa's revolutionary army – not to fight, but as an observer. His last documented letter out of Mexico was December 26, 1913. Then he disappeared. Rumors include his death by a Mexican firing squad or in one of several battles.

Bierce wrote many short stories, in three broad categories: Civil War Stories, Horror Stories, and Tall Tales. Stories, plus his poems and other writings, totaled more than four million words, <http://www.ambrosebierce.org/works.html>

Bierce was a Civil War veteran, and fought at the Battle of Shiloh (April 1862). This experience led to his memoir “What I Saw of Shiloh,” published in 1881.

His most famous short story, from the Civil War genre, is “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge.” I read it years ago and remember being impressed by the twist at the end. Possibly it influenced how I ended one my own short fiction, “The Grand Illusion.” This story, pared to 1200 words, was selected for the FWA 2021 Collection anthology; it is included in [Appendix D](#).

I have always been impressed by another Bierce work, *The Devil's Dictionary*. It's a masterful collection of putdowns and satirical definitions, plus a smattering of Bierce-authored poems, that should at least be skimmed by every author. The definitions were written over decades, then collected into one volume first published in 1906 in England as *The Cynic's Word Book*. It came out in a new edition in 1911 as *The Devil's Dictionary* and has been in print ever since.



Below are a few of Bierce's original definitions, followed by another group I imagine Bierce would write if he had lived in the modern era and retired to a community like The Villages, FL.

From *The Devil's Dictionary*, by Ambrose Bierce

Abnormal, adj. Not conforming to standard. In matters of thought and conduct, to be independent is to be abnormal, to be abnormal is to be detested.

Admiration, n. Our polite recognition of another's resemblance to ourselves.

Alliance, n. In international politics, the union of two thieves who have their hands so deeply inserted in each other's pocket that they cannot separately plunder a third.

Cat, n. A soft, indestructible automaton provided by nature to be kicked when things go wrong in the domestic circle.

Childhood, n. The period of human life intermediate between the idiocy of infancy and the folly of youth—two removes from the sin of manhood and three from the remorse of age.

Education, n. That which discloses to the wise and disguises from the foolish their lack of understanding.

Egotist, n. A person of low taste, more interested in himself than in me.

Influence, n. In politics, a visionary *quo* given in exchange for a substantial *quid*.

Interpreter, n. One who enables two persons of different languages to understand each other by repeating to each what it would have been to the interpreter's advantage for the other to have said.

Lawyer, n. One skilled in circumvention of the law.

Litigation, n. A machine which you go into as a pig and come out of as a sausage.

Love, n. A temporary insanity curable by marriage or by removal of the patient from the influences under which he incurred the disorder.

Marriage, n. A household consisting of a master, a mistress, and two slaves, making in all, two.

Me, pron. The objectionable case of I. The personal pronoun in English has three cases, the dominative, the objectionable and the oppressive. Each is all three.

Piano, n. A parlor utensil for subduing the impenitent visitor. It is operated by depressing the keys of the machine and the spirits of the audience.

Polygamy, n. A house of atonement, or expiatory chapel, fitted with several stools of repentance, as distinguished from monogamy, which has but one.

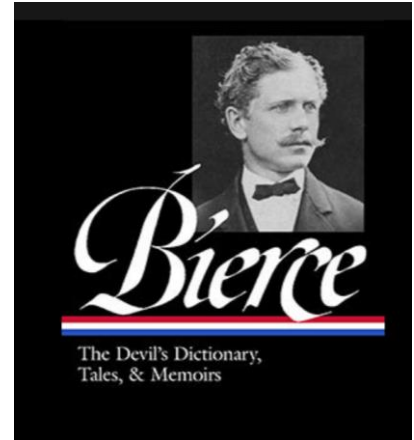
Positive, a. Mistaken at the top of one's voice.

Prejudice, n. A vagrant opinion without visible means of support.

Rear, n. In American military matters, that exposed part of the army that is nearest to Congress.

Sycophant, n. One who approaches Greatness on his belly so that he may not be commanded to turn and be kicked.

Telephone, n. An invention of the devil which abrogates some of the advantages of making a disagreeable person keep his distance.



Definitions Bierce might have crafted had he lived in a modern retirement community and been part of the local writing culture.

Agent, n. In the publishing world, someone trained to ignore all writer queries, though she may be allowed one canned reply a month in the name of civility, to wit, “It’s not right for us.”

Agent query, n. A short note that is supposed to grab the agent’s attention about your book. If opened. If read.

Baseball, n. A long, mostly boring drama, after which half the audience is disappointed.

Comma, n. Punctuation mark invented to plague the author, ceaselessly.

Computer, n. Device that replaces “the dog,” “weather,” “spouse,” and “bad luck” as the cause of all screw-ups.

Congress, n. Source for comedic material, originating with Mark Twain: “Suppose you were a congressman. Now, suppose you were an idiot. But I repeat myself.”

Critique Group, n. A group whose members comment on items like “comma placement,” “point of view,” and “speech tag” to hide what they really think about your writing.

Cruise, n. – A most popular form of travel, undertaken by people who think “Titanic” was just a movie.

Editor, n. A person trained to make your manuscript read like they wrote it.

Exclamation point, n. More than one per novel is too many.

Flying, n. – A means of travel with three classes of accommodation for long flights: very uncomfortable, uncomfortable, and tolerable.

Golf, n. A game in which you hit a small white ball, then, being ignorant of all laws of physics, you yell where it should go.

Golf cart, n. A device to keep golfers from getting much-needed exercise when playing the game.

Grandkids, n. Offspring whose accomplishments, when told by the grandparents to a most unlucky and captive audience, seem to far exceed those of Babe Ruth, Einstein, Picasso, and Hemingway combined.

Moon, n. A heavenly body, often claimed as belonging to a city (Miami), a river, or a song (dozens); Frank really didn't want to fly there.

Moon, v. To show one's brains in public.

Pickleball, n. A sport in which the player will likely turn into the first part of the name if he does not wear smooth-soled shoes on the court.

Pizza, n. The most written about food item in the history of mankind. Find under headings: "Where's the best pizza in (city, town, suburb, village, hamlet)?"

Pizza Wars, n. Interminable battles among New York, Chicago, Detroit, and Sicily, over who can make you fatter the fastest.

Point of view, n. One of several aspects of fiction encumbered with rules that guarantee full employment to the Critique Group Police.

Publisher, n. A company that puts out books, 98% of which die on the vine, but won't take yours because they claim to know what books will sell.

Rock concert, n. An event designed to accelerate hearing loss among attendees.

Self-publish, v. An activity of writers who live in fantasyland.

Self-publisher, n. One who affirms Shakespeare's famous Macbeth soliloquy: "It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

Semi-colon, n. A pariah always looking for a home.

Smart phone, n. A device whose prodigious use elevates it above alcohol as a cause of highway deaths.

Television, n. An idiot box; originally the idiot was the viewer, but in more modern times he is the one speaking in the box.

The Villages, FL, n. A large retirement community where the women can't get pregnant and the men look like they are.

Wall Street analyst (synonyms: stock picker, investment advisor), n. A job, the execution of which, confirms that monkeys throwing darts really can do better.

Writing contests, n. A legal gambit to separate the hopeful from their money.

FWA – RPLA – Collection Anthology

After retiring, in addition to joining The Villages critique groups and WLOV, I also joined Florida Writers Association (FWA). Florida is the third most populous state, with a lot of retirees assembling their memoirs or working on that long-thought-about novel they finally have time to write. Result: a lot of active writers. FWA has about 1400 members, willing to spend \$50 a year for what the organization has to offer: writing contests, conferences, networking, and a monthly newsletter.

The two major FWA contests are Royal Palm Literary Awards (RPLA) and Collection, the latter a yearly anthology of sixty short works selected out of about two hundred entered, and published in paperback each fall.

Royal Palm Literary Awards

RPLA accepts entries in over 28 genres, ranging from novels and full-length nonfiction, to blog posts, short stories and poems. It is very competitive. I've won several RPLA awards, but many more entries did not win anything. Sometimes an entry just wasn't good enough. But other times an entry would be a finalist one year, and the next year not even make the semi-finals.

The judging is by nature very subjective. I know, as I've been an RPLA judge for several years. All RPLA judges are unpaid volunteers, who can also be contest entrants. We can pick the genre(s) we wish to judge, but must opt out of any for which we have submitted an entry.



Each RPLA entry is reviewed by two anonymous judges, and assigned 1-10 points in ten different categories. To win an award, you pretty much have to have both judges score your work in the high 80s or 90s. I've had stories achieving a fantastic score of 90+ by one judge, and an abysmal score in the low 70s by another. The scores are averaged, which means....no win for that story.

Judges' critiques are anonymous, but we are encouraged to be helpful to the author, not mean. After the contest is over the judges' written critiques are sent to the authors. Sometimes it's an effort not to be snarky. For one memoir I reviewed, the writer told about her life growing up, getting married, moving to another state, having a child, having that child grow up and move away, etc. Except she omitted mention of who she was, where she grew up, when or where her child was born, what states she lived in, where her child moved to, and any other identifying information. Her story read like she was in a witness-protection program! Low score by me.

RPLA is a well-run contest, but expensive to enter, ranging from about \$20 to \$60 per entry, depending on its length and how close to the deadline you send it in (the contest runs from Feb 1 to April 30 each year). There is no prize money. Winners get a display plaque, bragging rights and some local publicity. I've certainly taken advantage of bragging rights for this memoir; my awards suggest, at the least, that I'm not a complete writing dolt.

FWA Collection Anthology

For the FWA Collection anthology, each year is a different theme, and the submissions can be fiction, nonfiction, or poetry. They just have to adhere to the stated theme, and for prose come in at under 1200 words. Unlike RPLA, there is no submission fee, but you do have to be an FWA member to enter the contest. You can submit one or two stories, but only one can be selected for publication. I have submitted entries for seven years and made the book in five of them. Below are the five volumes in which my stories appear, and the name of the selected story.

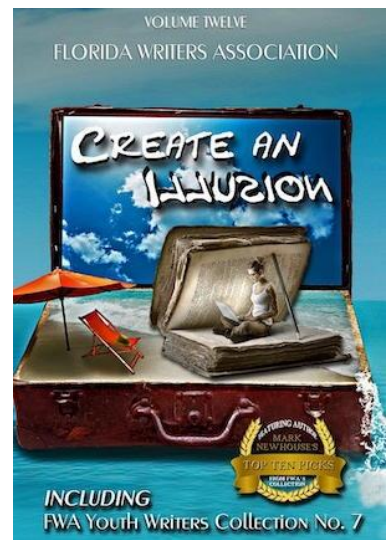
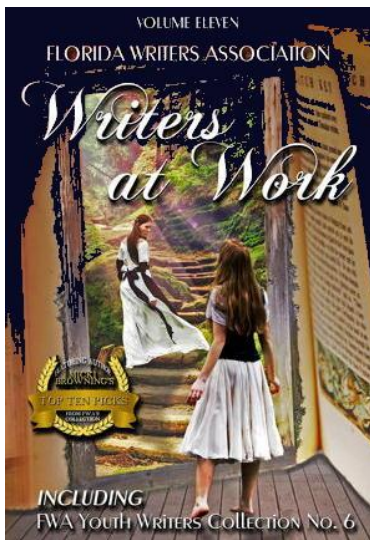
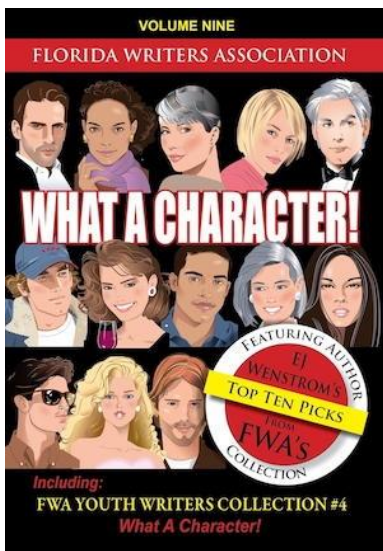
Volume Nine (2017), What a Character! – “Maestro”

Volume Eleven (2019), Writers at Work – “Robert and His Muse”

Volume Twelve (2020), Create an Illusion – “A Grand Illusion”

Volume Fourteen (2022), Thrills and Chills – “Auto-Drive”

Volume Fifteen (2023), Secrets – “A Well-kept Martian Secret”



Postscript

For Volume Twelve (2020), my story “A Grand Illusion” was selected. It’s about a Las Vegas magician who cheats on his wife. She has a plan – will it work?

My other submission on this 2020 theme was “A Fatal Illusion,” which is very different, with a clear historical context. It takes place in Berlin, shortly before Hitler is appointed German Chancellor.

Both stories are short (1200 words) and are included in [Appendix D](#).

Agatha Christie (1890 – 1976)

On June 9, 2022, the Wall Street Journal published a front-page story:

Young People Discover Hot New Writer—Agatha Christie

Mysteries with elderly Marple and fussy Poirot—helped by stylish movies—resonate with clever plots, red herrings; ‘She’s two steps ahead of the reader’

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/agatha-christie-popular-young-11654782306?page=1>

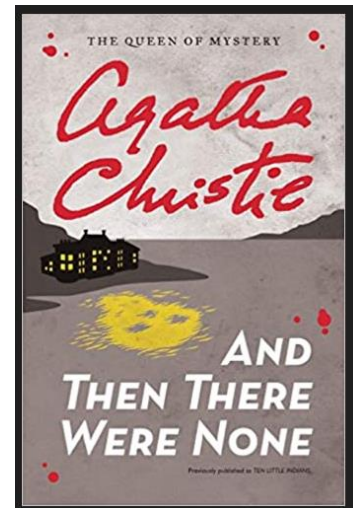
Agatha Christie first became famous in the 1920s as a mystery writer. In her long career she wrote sixty-six crime novels, fourteen short story collections, and nineteen plays. One of her plays, *The Mousetrap*, is the longest-running ever. It opened in London on November 25, 1952, and by September 2018 there had been more than 27,500 performances. The play closed in March 2020 because of Covid-19, and reopened in May 2021.

Guinness World Records lists Christie as the best-selling fiction writer of all time. Her novels have sold more than a billion copies in English, and another billion in numerous foreign languages. She is outsold only by the Bible and Shakespeare.

But young people flocking to her? They don’t appear to be flocking to other early 20th century authors like Fitzgerald, Faulkner, or Raymond Chandler. At least not enough to generate this type of news feature.

“She’s the next hot thing,” for younger generations, we’re told. Teens quoted in the article comment on Christie’s “unique way of storytelling...very rare nowadays,” and that her “pacing works very well,” whereas the “language was too old timey” for classic novelists, such as Jane Austen.

The WSJ article traces the jump in interest to the 2017 movie version of “Murder on the Orient Express,” featuring Kenneth Branagh as the Belgian detective Hercule Poirot. After that movie release, “sales went up for all the books,” stated Christie’s great-grandson, who manages her literary and media rights.



Of course, older generations have long been enthralled with Christie’s works. They caught my interest because of their twisty plot endings, which I incorporated into one novel and several short stories, some of which have won writing awards. These are not in the Christie genre, but they do have that one Christie element – an unpredictable, surprise ending. What happens after a frustrated pianist makes a deal with the devil? How will a tourist in India deal with a beggar tapping on his cab window? What happens after the wife of a philandering magician decides to do away with her husband?

This last question is answered by a short story I mentioned in the previous chapter, “A Grand Illusion.” It can be read in [Appendix D](#).

Three Early Doctor-Writers: Holmes, Chekhov, Doyle

In this section I briefly profile three early doctor-writers: Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr.; Anton Chekhov; and Arthur Conan Doyle. Though their work was not a particular influence on my writing, the duality of their careers always fascinated me. Of course, medical practice in the nineteenth century was very different from modern times: no x-rays, no antibiotics, and no malpractice lawsuits. Also, though they each practiced medicine to some extent, that was not the focus of their careers. Holmes was an Ivy League academician and administrator. Chekhov practiced for a few years, but died at the young age of forty-four, so we don't know how he would have combined his growing literary fame with a medical career. Doyle lived to age seventy-one but early on, with the success of Sherlock Holmes, gave up medicine altogether

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. (1809 – 1894)

I can only imagine what the practice of medicine was like two centuries ago. Leeches. Very few effective drugs. They had alcohol, quinine, opium, and morphine, and a bunch of quack medicine (as we do today). The stethoscope had not yet been invented. Anesthesia was not discovered until the mid-1840s, and then it took decades to become widely used. It was not until 1847 that Ignaz Semmelweis revolutionized childbirth by showing handwashing could help prevent puerperal infections. Holmes's life spanned most of the 19th century, so he witnessed a few important changes in medical practice, such as anesthesia.

People sometimes confuse the two famous Americans with this name. The senior Holmes – subject of this profile – was a practicing physician, academician, and prolific author of essays and poems. His son, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., (1841 –1935), was a United States Supreme Court Justice.

Holmes senior went to Harvard Medical School, and also received medical training in Paris. He taught at Dartmouth and Harvard and for many years served as dean of Harvard's medical school.

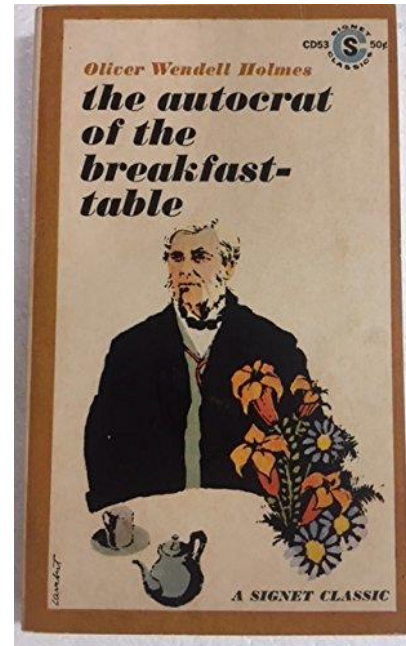
I remember in my early training reading a famous Holmes quote about 19th century pharmacology. It is from a speech at the annual meeting of the Massachusetts Medical Society, May 30, 1860.

We frequently hear the remark 'that on the whole more harm than good is done by medication'. Excluding opium 'which the Creator himself seems to prescribe', wine which is a food, and the vapors which produce the miracle of anesthesia and I firmly believe that if the whole material medica, as now used, could be sunk to the bottom of the sea, it would be all the better for mankind—and all the worse for the fishes.

Actually, what I remember is the part that begins with “...if the whole material medica...” The first part of the paragraph is seldom quoted.

Holmes is most famous as a poet and essayist. Many of his works were published in *The Atlantic Monthly*, a magazine that he named. His works include:

- “Old Ironsides,” 1830 – a poem influential in the preservation of the USS *Constitution*. Holmes was 21 when it was published., and gave him instant fame.
- “Breakfast-Table” essays, which began with perhaps his most famous work, *The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table* (1858). The essays take the form of a chiefly one-sided dialogue between the unnamed “Autocrat” (Holmes) and the other residents of a New England boarding house at breakfast. The Autocrat holds forth various topics, including the advantages of old age, how to handle conversation, and other “right rules” for living. The tone of the book is New England Yankee, with a half-comical, half serious approach to the topics. A few quotes from “Autocrat:”
 - “Every now and then a man's mind is stretched by a new idea or sensation, and never shrinks back to its former dimensions.”
 - “Nothing is so common-place as to wish to be remarkable.”
 - “You may set it down as a truth which admits of few exceptions, that those who ask your opinion really want your praise, and will be contented with nothing else.”



There were two sequels to *Autocrat*: *The Professor at the Breakfast-Table*, 1859, and *The Poet at the Breakfast-Table*, 1872. These works are freely available online at Project Gutenberg.

- Project Gutenberg edition of *The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*
- Project Gutenberg edition of *The Professor at the Breakfast Table*
- Project Gutenberg edition of *The Poet at the Breakfast Table*

Anton Chekhov (1860-1904)

Of all doctor writers throughout history, Anton Chekhov reigns supreme, as he is widely considered one of the world’s greatest writers. Yet he died young, age 44, from tuberculosis. During his all-too-brief career he wrote six plays and numerous short stories. He is best known for four plays, considered classics and often performed in the modern era:

- *The Seagull* (1896)
- *Uncle Vanya* (1899)
- *Three Sisters* (1901)

- The Cherry Orchard (1904)

His many short stories include the following masterpieces.

- The Lady with the Dog
- The ‘About Love’ Trilogy
 - The Man in a Case
 - Gooseberries
 - About Love
- Ward No. 6
- A Joke
- The Darling
- On Official Duty (On Official Business)
- The Night Before Easter.
- The Grasshopper.
- The Darling.
- Kashtanka
- The Black Monk
- Sleepy
- The Boys
- The Bet
- In the Ravine

Chekhov was born in southern Russia. While studying medicine at Moscow University he began writing humorous tales for money. Also, while in medical school he had his first bout of hemoptysis (coughing up blood), a sign of the disease that was to end his life in 1904.

Chekhov received his medical degree in 1884 and shortly afterwards published his first collection of short stories, *Tales of Melpomene*. Other story collections followed, as well as his plays: “The Seagull” in 1898, “Uncle Vanya” in 1899, “The Three Sisters” in 1901 and “The Cherry Orchard” in 1904.

Regarding Chekhov’s dual career of writer and doctor, on July 15, 2004, the New England Journal of Medicine published an article on the 100th anniversary of his death. The author, Dr. Robert S. Schwartz, titled his article “Medicine is My Lawful Wife.” <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp048130>. The quote is from an 1888 letter Chekhov wrote to a friend, published in translation at https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/6408/pg6408-images.html#link2H_4_0035.

... You advise me not to hunt after two hares, and not to think of medical work. I do not know why one should not hunt two hares even in the literal sense.... I feel more confident and more satisfied with myself when I reflect that I have two professions and not one. Medicine is my lawful wife and literature is my mistress. When I get tired of one I spend the night with the other. Though it’s disorderly, it’s not so dull, and besides neither of them loses anything from my infidelity. If I did

not have my medical work I doubt if I could have given my leisure and my spare thoughts to literature. There is no discipline in me.

--Letter to Alexei Suvorin, 11 September 1888

Chekhov's bouts of hemoptysis from tuberculosis recurred two or three times a year, and on occasion he would go to spas for rest. (Drug treatment for tuberculosis did not come about until the late 1940s.) The last six months of his life were spent in Badenweiler, a health resort and spa in Germany. He died there at 3 a.m. on July 15, 1904. His body was shipped to Moscow, where he lies buried today.

Compared to other authors profiled in this memoir, all of whom wrote in English, appreciation of Chekhov's original syntax and word choices is not possible unless you read Russian. Consider these two translations of passages from his classic short story, "The Lady with the Dog."

The first translation is from

<https://everydayrussianlanguage.com/en/stories/lady-with-the-dog-1/>.

The second translation is from

<https://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/webpub/english/compclass/Public%20Domain%20Readings/Chekhov%20The%20Lady%20with%20the%20Dog.pdf>.

First paragraph, Translation #1

It was said that a new person had appeared on the sea-front: a lady with a little dog. Dmitri Dmitritch Gurov, who had by then been a fortnight at Yalta, and so was fairly at home there, had begun to take an interest in new arrivals. Sitting in Verney's pavilion, he saw, walking on the sea-front, a fair-haired young lady of medium height, wearing a *béret*; a white Pomeranian dog was running behind her.

First paragraph, Translation #2

People were telling one another that a newcomer had been seen on the promenade—a lady with a dog. Dmitri Dmitrich Gurov had been a fortnight in Yalta, and was accustomed to its ways, and he, too, had begun to take an interest in fresh arrivals. From his seat in Vernet's outdoor café, he caught sight of a young woman in a toque, passing along the promenade; she was fair and not very tall; after her trotted a white pomeranian.

Which do you like better? Below I conjure up comments for Dr. Chekhov ("Anton") if he read these two English translations in a modern critique group.

Comments on Translation #1

"Anton, 'it was said that' is both passive and has an unneeded 'that'. How about something simpler, like 'people were telling one another...?'"

“Anton, ‘fair-haired’ doesn’t help in the description. Is that blond, brunette?”

Comments on Translation #2:

“Anton, ‘were telling’ is awkward; try changing it to ‘was said’, and thus get rid of the -ing word.”

“Anton, ‘caught sight of’ is needless use of a preposition; how about just, ‘he saw’?”

“Anton, your description of her being ‘Not very tall’ seems needlessly vague. Why not just say of ‘average height’?”

And so it goes. Same scene with two different translations. We can critique large elements of the story – plot, pacing, character motives – but not the details of language (syntax, word choice) that we would ordinarily critique in English-language prose.

Below is the last paragraph from “The Lady with the Dog,” with two different translations from the websites above. Decide which you like better, and consider how you might critique either one.

Last paragraph, translation #1

And it seemed as though in a little while the solution would be found, and then a new and splendid life would begin; and it was clear to both of them that they had still a long, long road before them, and that the most complicated and difficult part of it was only just beginning.

Last paragraph, translation #2

And it seemed to them that they were within an inch of arriving at a decision, and that then a new, beautiful life would begin. And they both realized that the end was still far, far away, and that the hardest, the most complicated part was only just beginning.

Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930)

If Chekhov is the most lauded of all physician authors, Arthur Conan Doyle is probably the most widely read, due to his everlasting Sherlock Holmes stories. However, he wrote much more, and at one point actually killed off Holmes so his other writing could gain some traction with the public.

Historians divide his work into the “Sherlock Holmes canon,” and everything else. The “canon” consists of 56 short stories and the following four novels.

A Study in Scarlet (1887)

The Sign of the Four (1890)

The Hound of the Baskervilles (1901–1902)

The Valley of Fear (1914–1915)

“Everything else” includes fantasy and science fiction, plays, romances, poetry, non-fiction, and historical novels. One of Doyle's early short stories, “J. Habakuk Jephson’s Statement” (1884), helped to popularize the mystery of the ship *Marie Celeste*. (The *Celeste* was an American merchant ship found intact and abandoned by its crew near the Azores on December 4, 1872. The crew was never found and the reason they left the ship remains a mystery to this day.)

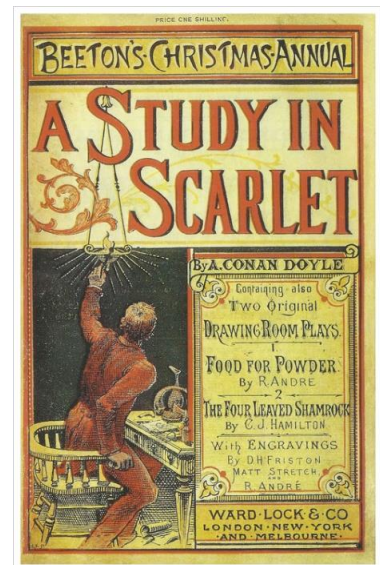
His first Sherlock Holmes short story (coming after two SH novels) was “A Scandal in Bohemia,” published in *The Strand*, July 1891. He would write 55 more short stories about the brilliant detective.

Doyle obtained his medical degree from the University of Edinburgh in 1880, but started writing long before. As a student he published two short stories, *The Mystery of Sasassa Valley* and *The American Tale*. While a student he met a number of future authors, including James Barrie and Robert Louis Stevenson. The inspiration for Sherlock Holmes came from Dr. Joseph Bell (1837-1911), a medical school lecturer at the University of Edinburgh 1837 –1911). Dr. Bell emphasized observation, logic, and deduction in medical diagnosis – all methods used by detective Sherlock Holmes.

While still in medical school Doyle signed on as ship’s doctor on the whaler *Hope*, which went to the Arctic Circle. On board Doyle kept a detailed journal, and in 1879 wrote his first sea story, *Captain of the Pole-Star*.

After medical school he was a medical officer on the steamer *Mayumba*, which took him from Liverpool to the west coast of Africa. He quit the job after returning to England, and set up practice in Plymouth with another physician. This didn’t work out (the partner was unscrupulous, Doyle would later write), and he moved 170 miles east to Portsmouth, where he opened his first solo practice.

For the next three years Doyle earned a comfortable income, but the urge to write grew stronger. In August 1885 he married the sister of one of his patients. In March 1886 he started writing the novel which catapulted him to fame. It came out in 1887 in *Beeton’s Christmas Annual*, under the title *A Study in Scarlet*, which introduced the immortal Sherlock Holmes and his sidekick Dr. Watson. As a side note, the publisher paid Doyle just £25 (\$31) for “all rights,” which meant no more money would be owed when it appeared in book form a year later. <https://medium.com/the-pub/what-do-publishers-really-pay-you-for-a-book-8b6bc76c302b>



On August 30, 1889, Conan Doyle and Oscar Wilde were both invited to a dinner in London by Joseph Marshall Stoddart, managing editor of the American *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*. The dinner was held at the Langham Hotel, a luxury hotel in London’s West End (and still in business). At the dinner both authors agreed to write novels to be published in *Lippincott's*.

Doyle's novel was his second involving Sherlock Holmes, *The Sign of the Four* (February 1890). Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was published in July 1890.

The Sign of The Four was instrumental in establishing Sherlock Holmes and Conan Doyle in the annals of literature. Was he also practicing medicine at the time?

Yes, but not very successfully. He had some training on the continent in ophthalmology, but never established a thriving eye-disease practice. Gradually his income from writing Sherlock Holmes and other stories eclipsed his medical income.

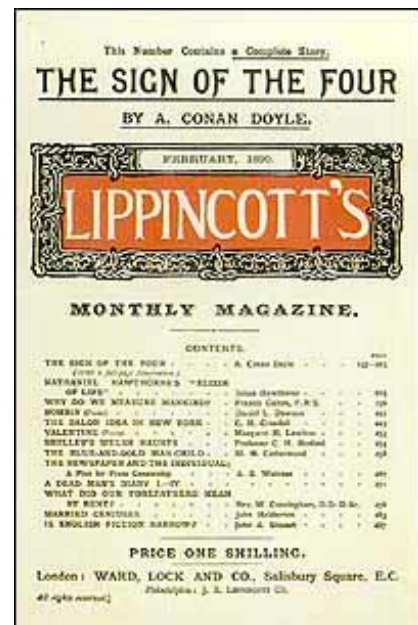
In May, 1891 he had an attack of influenza which left him deathly ill for several days. When his health improved, he made a career choice. "With a wild rush of joy," he decided to abandon his medical career. He added, "I remember in my delight taking the handkerchief which lay upon the coverlet in my enfeebled hand, and tossing it up to the ceiling in my exultation. I should at last be my own master." He was 31 years old. (At age 31 I had not yet begun my medical career.)

In 1892 Doyle and his wife had their second child, a boy. He continued to produce more short stories, but soon grew tired of his genius detective. He decided to get rid of Sherlock Holmes.

During a trip to Switzerland, Doyle found the spot where his detective was to be killed off. In *The Final Problem*, published in December 1893, Sherlock Holmes and Professor Moriarty plunged to their deaths at The Reichenbach Falls. (As a result, twenty thousand readers cancelled their subscriptions to *The Strand Magazine*.) Now freed from his medical career and from a fictional character that overshadowed what he considered his finer work, Conan Doyle immersed himself into even more intensive activity.

In 1893 Doyle's wife died and soon afterward he sailed for America, where he was booked to give talks in more than thirty cities. The tour was a huge success, judging by an article in the *Ladies Home Journal*. "Few foreign writers who have visited this country have made more friends than A. Conan Doyle. His personality is a peculiarly attractive one to Americans because it is so thoroughly wholesome..."

Doyle returned to England, and in 1901 decided to resurrect Holmes; that year he published the first episode of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Over the next twenty-nine years he would write many more short stories, essays and books. Doyle's biography is among the most fascinating of all writers, encompassing so many endeavors: medicine, spiritualism, sporting, public speaking, and politics.



As to medicine, very few contemporary writer-physicians have been able to quit practicing and pursue a creative art like writing. Physicians have quit medicine for other careers, e.g., law, business, financial planning, real estate, but I know of no physician who ever quit to pursue a career as writer, musician, artist, or actor.

It's far easier to be a successful doctor than successful (at least financially) in the creative arts, where the competition is fierce and the pay meager, except for a very, very few. The best examples I can think of, for doctors who quit medicine for writing: Anton Chekhov (1860-1904), Conan Doyle (1859-1930), and Robin Cook (b. 1940). Two other famous doctor writers – Somerset Maugham (1874-1965) and Michael Crichton (1942-1008) – never practiced medicine after graduating from medical school.

What Just Landed in The Villages?

There are general guidelines for what to call fiction of different lengths.

Under 1000 words - flash fiction
1000 -15,000 words – short story
15,000-50,000 words – novella
>50,000 words – novel

By 2018 I had accumulated nine brand new short stories plus a 19,000-word novella that I thought worth publishing.

Several of the stories had won FWA awards, and I decided to publish all nine along with the novella, using the latter’s title, *Visit to Sunnyville*. In the novella “Sunnyville” is a fictional Florida retirement community, a stand-in for where we live, The Villages.

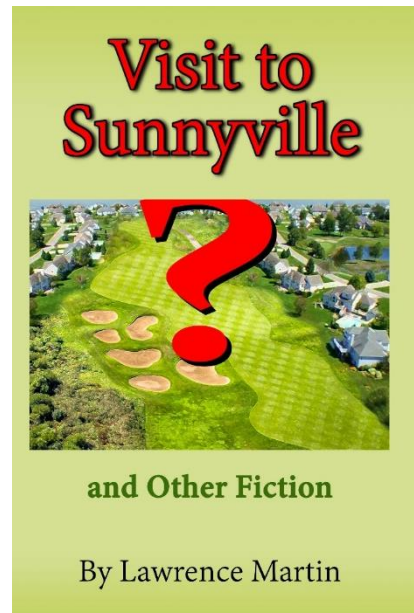
In the novella’s plot a huge, half-mile-tall metal slab has just landed in the middle of the night on a Sunnyville golf course. The nearby residents wake up and find the National Guard in place, and the world is put on notice of a possible alien invasion. However, there are no signals from the slab, no aliens, nothing. It just sits there.

The whole world goes agog over this history-shattering event, but not the residents of Sunnyville, who are mainly annoyed at the restrictions now placed on their movement. For example, they now have to go through checkpoints to get to Tai Chi and other clubs. Also, service help can’t come to work in restaurants. Evening entertainment in the town squares is closed, since the performers can’t get in.

I wrote the story as a good-natured spoof on retirement life in Florida, with no mayhem or violence. I hired an illustrator to produce some line drawings, then self-published *Visit to Sunnyville and Other Fiction* in 2018. I also included excerpts from six of my novels. So: novella, nine short stories, six novel excerpts.

When you self-publish you can do whatever you want, which of course can be both good and bad.

The “bad” part was a mistake in terms of potential marketing. I didn’t call the location where the slab landed “The Villages,” though that was clearly the physical description. I thought fictional “Sunnyville” might be better, more generic so to speak, with broader appeal nationwide. But Sunnyville held no special interest to Villagers, which I should have recognized as my target audience.



Visit to Sunnyville went nowhere, and I decided to redo the book, with a new title and cover. I also expanded the novella to 21,000 words, and added two more short stories. It's now *What Just Landed in The Villages? and Other Short Fiction*, a much better book, and is for sale in the local Barnes & Noble bookstore. Not a best-seller, but one that reflects my original intent – to promote my short fiction.

Postscript

Above, I state: When you self-publish you can do whatever you want. Without feedback from a knowledgeable book agent or traditional publisher, the self-published author is more or less unhinged, and doing “whatever you want” may not be a good idea. When I sent the book into an FWA writing competition, one judge criticized my inclusion of pictures of my writing awards and lengthy novel excerpts as unwarranted “self-promotion.” This situation alone dinged the score and took the book out of competition.

I agree with the criticism and plan to do a second edition, adding several new stories and removing the awards pictures and novel excerpts.



Mark Twain (1835 – 1910)

How can any modern writer not be influenced, to some extent, by Mark Twain? Well, at least any modern writer whose work includes humor or irony. It is amazing to read Twain's books from 150 years ago and find the writing as fresh and engaging as if written by a living humorist. In college, I read Twain's "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" and remember being impressed with its humor and how Twain told the tale. As for his full-length works, everyone kvells over *Huck Finn* and *Tom Sawyer*, but I find his non-fiction more engaging, particularly *Life on The Mississippi* and *The Innocents Abroad*.

Unlike other author profiles in this book, I will forgo any attempt to outline his life or survey his output. The main point for this memoir is that his writing was an influence, and I will take the liberty of giving examples.

In several stories I insert a bit of humor into an otherwise serious situation. At the beginning of my novella, *First Journey to Mars*, the NASA board is meeting to decide if and when to send humans on the first Mars mission. Winston is the board chairman, and in the meeting he explains the type of people sought for the trip. Serious stuff, until he calls on board member Melissa Turnberry.

"Actually," said Winston, "our plan is to recruit three astronaut couples, so there is both social and physical companionship on this long journey. For the amount of supplies and fuel we'll need, and the expertise to complete the mission, six seems to be the optimum number. We'll start by looking for three seasoned astronauts, and then check to see if their spouses have professional training crucial to the mission.

"For example, Melissa Turnberry," Winston continued, looking at a fortyish woman sitting next to Roberts, "you're a trained astronaut. Your husband, I know, is a surgeon. You two would be an ideal couple for the journey."

"Not happening," said Melissa. "He loves his work at Baylor, in the operating suite where there's always plenty of oxygen. Unless you think we'll find some Martians with appendicitis or hernias."

"Is he certified in alien surgery?" asked McCumber, a retired astronaut and the senior-most member of the Board, at age sixty-one. "We don't want to export the wrong specialty to Mars."

Maybe not laugh-out-loud humor, but something to enliven an otherwise serious meeting. In my novella *What Just Landed in The Villages?* I insert bits of humor throughout. A giant object from outer space has just landed on a golf course in The Villages, Florida, very close to where Martha and George live. They are in bed, watching a TV news interview where the local Sheriff is being asked about the object. The object's landing is the most significant (and unexplained) single event in the history of mankind, and will soon affect the lifestyle of all Villages residents.

“Sir, do we have any idea where this object came from?”

“None whatsoever. I am not even going to speculate. Right now we are securing the area and waiting on federal officials. Also, the governor is sending out National Guard troops to help if needed. We’ll hopefully know more with sunrise.”

“There’s always something going on in The Villages,” said George.

Martha nodded in agreement. “Can’t we just go to sleep and deal with this in the morning? I have tai chi at nine o’clock.”

Two more examples. I wrote a short tongue-in-cheek story about the Golf Gods, those mythical spirits who watch over your golf game, intent on messing with you. It begins thus:

The golf gods are not nice. They’re not benevolent, either.

Maybe you don’t believe in golf gods. Or maybe you’re one of those non-golfer monotheists, and just assume there can only be one golf god. If so, doesn’t really matter what you think. Most of us who play the game have enough firsthand experience to believe they’re real. And there’s surely a group of them, not just one. Don’t think just one could cover all the courses and all the millions of golfers.

If the ancient Greeks had played golf, they would have identified the golf gods for us. They certainly knew about not-nice gods and goddesses. *Nemesis* was the Greek goddess of retribution and vengeance and would be about right as the first golf god. But golf is a modern game, at least compared to discus throwing, so we’ve only learned about golf gods in modern times. Now we don’t make any distinction about gender; simplifies things to just call them all gods.

And they are a mean bunch. Get on their wrong side and you are hosed. What you really want to do is: a) never ask for their help, and b) try to stay out of sight. You can learn the first part through rigid self-control but part b, well that’s most difficult. They see every hole, every shot; some folks think they can even *read your mind*. I personally don’t think so, but I could be wrong.

In a story titled “Crusade,” pulmonary specialist Dr. Miller (my alias in the story) tries to get a woman patient to quit smoking. She’s in the hospital because her lungs are damaged from cigarettes, yet she takes every opportunity to smoke in the patient lounge! (The story takes place before hospitals banned all smoking.) Dr. Miller has a brilliant idea to get her to quit. It ends with a bit of humor and self-deprecation, not unlike something Twain would write. The full story is in [Appendix D](#).

Postscript

Today, Twain is most famous for his fiction (*Tom Sawyer*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*) with *Finn* considered one of the greatest American novels. However, during his lifetime Twain was actually more popular for nonfiction, particularly his travel writing.

In 1867 he embarked on a six-month religious tour of Europe and the Holy Land, aboard the chartered vessel *Quaker City*. During the journey he wrote several dozen articles for U.S. newspapers (in San Francisco and New York). These were put together in a book and published as *The Innocents Abroad or The New Pilgrims' Progress* in 1869. Full of typical Twain humor and irony, *Innocents* became the best-selling single book during his lifetime. Here are two brief excerpts:

Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime."

It liberates the vandal to travel — you never saw a bigoted, opinionated, stubborn, narrow-minded, self-conceited, almighty mean man in your life but he had stuck in one place since he was born and thought God made the world and dyspepsia and bile for his especial comfort and satisfaction.

The Innocents Abroad is noteworthy for another reason. Twain provides an eyewitness description of Palestine during the 1860s, as desolate, barren, almost devoid of people. The following paragraphs are from Chapter LVI.

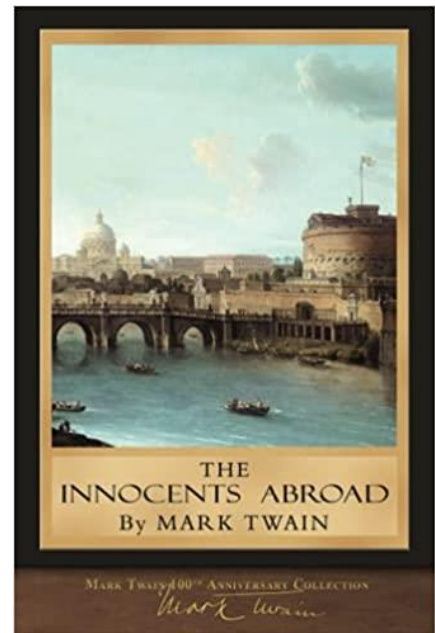
So ends the pilgrimage. We ought to be glad that we did not make it for the purpose of feasting our eyes upon fascinating aspects of nature, for we should have been disappointed—at least at this season of the year. A writer in "Life in the Holy Land" observes:

"Monotonous and uninviting as much of the Holy Land will appear to persons accustomed to the almost constant verdure of flowers, ample streams and varied surface of our own country, we must remember that its aspect to the Israelites after the weary march of forty years through the desert must have been very different."

Which all of us will freely grant. But it truly *is* "monotonous and uninviting," and there is no sufficient reason for describing it as being otherwise.

Of all the lands there are for dismal scenery, I think Palestine must be the prince. The hills are barren, they are dull of color, they are unpicturesque in shape. The valleys are unsightly deserts fringed with a feeble vegetation that has an expression about it of being sorrowful and despondent. The Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee sleep in the midst of a vast stretch of hill and plain wherein the eye rests upon no pleasant tint, no striking object, no soft picture dreaming in a purple haze or mottled with the shadows of the clouds. Every outline is harsh, every feature is distinct, there is no perspective—distance works no enchantment here. It is a hopeless, dreary, heart-broken land.

Small shreds and patches of it must be very beautiful in the full flush of spring, however, and all the more beautiful by contrast with the far-reaching desolation that surrounds them on every side. I would like much to see the fringes of the Jordan in spring-time, and Shechem, Esdraelon, Ajalon and the borders of Galilee—but even then these spots would seem mere toy gardens set at wide intervals in the waste of a limitless desolation.

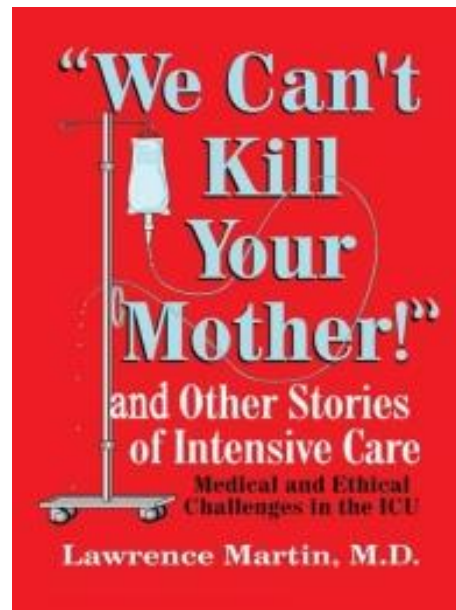
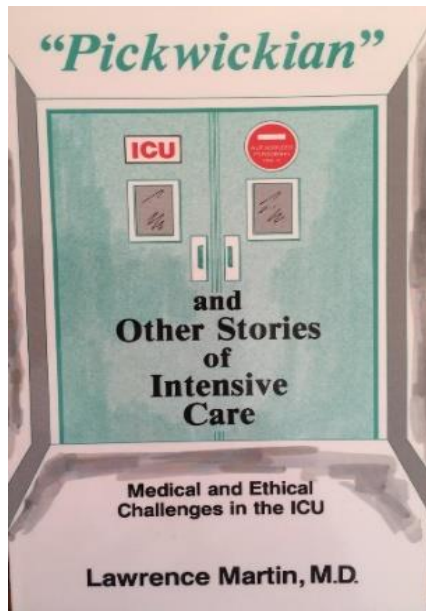


Twain's description is often quoted by people making an argument that the Jews who came to Israel in the late nineteenth century did not take over some prosperous land full of Arabs. Both Alan Dershowitz and Benjamin Netanyahu, among others, have cited Twain's account.

Others have pointed out that Twain exaggerated his observations for effect, and that other descriptions of the area differ. In any case, Twain's description is not going to change anyone's mind about the modern-day Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It simply serves as another example of the importance of this great American writer. Had *The Innocents Abroad* been written by some unknown author, I doubt anyone would be quoting it today.

From “Pickwickian” to *Stories of Intensive Care*

In 1991 I self-published “Pickwickian,” a collection of ten stories about patients in intensive care. Not happy with that book, I redid it with a new cover, added a couple of new stories, and published it as “*We Can’t Kill Your Mother!*” in 2001, with vanity publisher Author House. (See previous chapters on these two books.)



Eighteen years later I decided the book needed a new slant and a title change. I thought the “Mother” angle was great, but it didn’t generate any sales, so I decided to just call the book what it is, “Stories of Intensive Care.”

Over a full year I read every story to my critique group, and received some excellent suggestions, which led to a lot of editing. By 2020 I was ready for the new release. I secured a new cover from bookcovers.com.

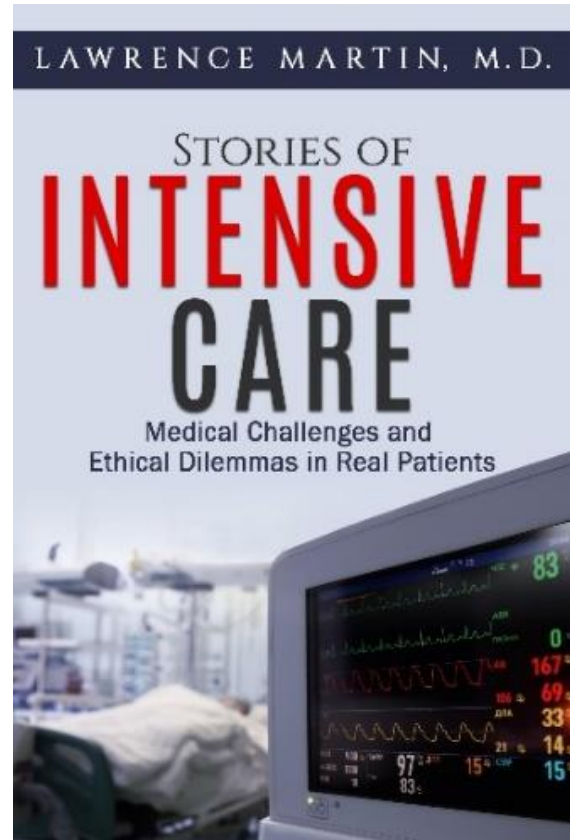
This time I didn’t go with Amazon’s Kindle Direct Publishing (as I had with my fiction), but with Draft to Digital, another self-publishing platform. D2D gets your book on Apple and other book markets.

Stories of Intensive Care came out in early 2020, just before the pandemic shut everything down. <https://www.amazon.com/Stories-Intensive-Care-Challenges-Dilemmas/dp/0997895950/>

Stories of Intensive Care
Medical Challenges and Ethical Dilemmas in Real Patients

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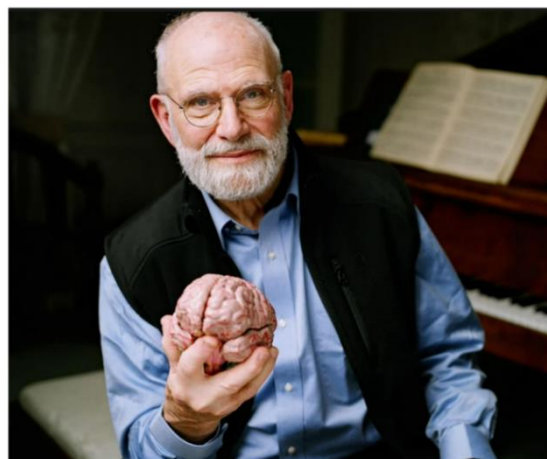
I am very pleased with the book but, like just about everything else I've written, spent no time (or money) promoting it. I was on to something else. Something totally different. A space novella.

Oliver Sacks, M.D.

Of the medical authors profiled in this book, Oliver Sacks is the only one to achieve literary fame writing nonfiction. He is also the only one whose works inspired not only a Hollywood movie, but also an opera, a ballet, and a play—all based on his 1973 book *Awakenings*.

Sacks was born in London of Jewish parents. His mother was a surgeon and his father a general practitioner. About them he wrote:

Both of my parents were physicians, and I grew up in a house full of medical stories. At dinner, my mother or father would often tell stories of patients they had seen that day—stories of lives whose course had been cut across by disease or injury...it was perhaps inevitable that I would finally gravitate to medicine, with its study and stories of people.¹



Oliver Sacks; from <https://www.theatlantic.com/>

After obtaining an MD degree at Oxford University, Sacks moved to the U.S., where he completed his medical training: an internship in San Francisco, followed by a neurology residency at UCLA. He then moved to New York City, where he remained the rest of his life. During his career, he was on staff at three NYC medical schools, starting with Albert Einstein College of Medicine, followed by New York University and Columbia University.

In researching Sacks's career, I was surprised to learn he had a faculty appointment at Albert Einstein while I was a resident and pulmonary fellow in the same institution (1973-1976), though in a different hospital. He worked as a neurologist at Beth Abraham Hospital, a long-term care facility in the Bronx; I trained at Jacobi Hospital, the main teaching unit of Albert Einstein.

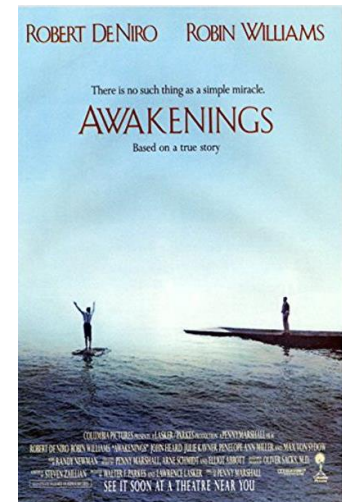
Except for being a doctor who writes books, Sacks and I have nothing in common career-wise. His work focused on one genre—weird or unusual neurologic conditions, for which he became world famous. He did not write fiction. My writing is all over the place (ten genres!), and includes self-published fiction—and of course, no fame. However, as I'll point out later, I did write one book about patients that gives me some insight into criticism of his work.

Starting in 1969, Sacks began using the experimental drug L-Dopa on patients suffering from *encephalitis lethargica*. The patients were in a decades' long state of catatonia, and the drug awakened them. The remarkable results were unfortunately not long-lasting, and many of the patients developed drug side effects such as tics, seizures, and manic behavior. His experience with the drug led to writing *Awakenings*.

Other books followed soon after, but I did not become aware of his literary output until I read, years later, his 1985 book *The Man Who Mistook his Wife for a Hat and Other Clinical Tales*. The title story deals with Dr. P., who had visual agnosia, an inability to recognize objects, particularly faces. In a clinic visit, as Dr. P. gets ready to leave, “he reached out his hand and took hold of his wife’s head, tried to lift it off, to put it on. He had apparently mistaken his wife for a hat!”²

Sacks was prolific, writing several best sellers, all centered on patients and their peculiar illnesses. In one *New York Times* book review he was referred to as “the poet laureate of medicine.”³ He also wrote articles for *The New Yorker* and the *New York Review of Books*.

His fame grew considerably in 1990, when the movie based on *Awakenings* came out, starring Robin Williams and William DeNiro. The film received very positive reviews and was nominated for three academy awards (Best Picture, Best Adapted Screenplay, Best Actor (De Niro)).



Sacks’s personal life was very different from other authors profiled in this book. He was somewhat of a rebel as a young physician, using hallucinogens on himself for their mind-altering effects. He was also an avid motorcyclist, traveling thousands of highway miles on his machine. He never married, and in his later years maintained a gay relationship with a journalist.

Also of note, he never applied for U.S. citizenship, though he spent most of his adult life in this country and did almost all of his published writing in New York. Biographically, his decision not to become a U.S. citizen seemed unimportant, and I never thought much about it until a visit to Chicago’s American Writer’s Museum, which profiles just about every well-known American Writer.⁴ After touring all the exhibits and finding nothing about Oliver Sacks, I asked a staff member why he was left out. I thought it might be because he was born in England, but then other foreign-born writers were included, such as Ayn Rand and Isaac Asimov. Birthplace wasn’t the issue; it was citizenship. “We’re sorry,” I was told, “but he doesn’t meet the museum’s criteria of being an *American* writer.”

Sacks was not without his detractors. One neurological expert accused him of relying too much on anecdotal evidence in his writings. Others criticized him for exploiting his subjects, and for writing what amounted to a “neurological freak show.”⁵ In the most piercing putdown, one disability activist said he was “the man who mistook his patients for a literary career.”⁶

My nonfiction book, *Stories of Intensive Care*, deals with several patients one might call “freakish,” such as a morbidly obese woman with sleep apnea, a man who faked a severe illness, and another man who became wild after an unintentional overdose.⁷ If I had written several books of this nature, and become famous for the works, I might also be criticized for “exploiting” my patients. It does seem that fame for any author will bring out detractors, whose points may have some validity, but should be balanced against the readers’ reception *and*

perception—which are most favorable in Sacks’s case. (For perhaps the most extreme example of critics vs. readers, see my profile of Ayn Rand in Part I.)

Oliver Sacks died from metastatic melanoma August 30, 2015, age 82. Obituaries were laudatory of his career and writing, but also pointed out the criticisms. On August 30, 2015 the British newspaper *The Guardian* noted:

One common accusation is that his writings are a “neurological freak show” that allowed him to profit unjustifiably from his practice. His more numerous admirers find this accusation wide of the mark. Illness makes “freaks” of us all at one time or another. Sacks’s sympathetic insight into the human brain, and the human condition, through the medium of illness, heartened many more readers than it offended.⁵

An article in the British medical journal *The Lancet*, Sept 19, 2015, noted:

Some criticized Sacks for exploiting his patients in his writings, whereas others say he was sensitive to their privacy and wellbeing. “He did to every patient as if they were his relative or himself. It was his guiding principle,” says Orrin Devinsky, Professor of Neurology, Neuroscience, and Psychiatry at New York University. “He broke down traditional barriers in medicine. He watched his patients work, he went to their homes, he shared meals with them.”

...The accusation that Sacks wrote “fairy tales” is arguably more telling. Sacks’s case histories lack the meticulous measurements and experimental detail that contemporary science expects of its practitioners. Sacks undoubtedly drew from life in his writings though he may have used a measure of embellishment when it suited his purpose. But his readers turn to him, not for mathematical precision, but for his splendidly readable prose, sympathetic portraits of his patients, broad intellectual horizons and an abiding sense of wonder at the world.⁸

Sacks’s career serves to highlight the wide spectrum of physician authors, from those known for their fiction writing, to those whose fame rests mainly on nonfiction. Or, looked at another way, from writing that critics might call literary (Oliver Sacks, Anton Chekhov, Carlos Williams, Somerset Maugham) to non-literary (Robin Cook, Michael Crichton, Alexander McCall Smith).

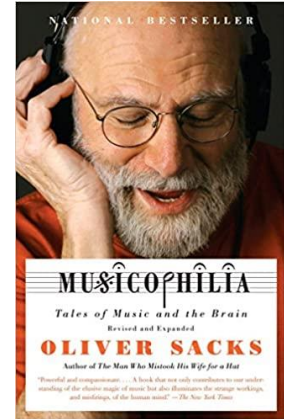
When I started playing the piano and writing about music, I read another of Sacks’s books, *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain*. One tale, “A Bolt from the Blue: Sudden Musicophilia,” is about a forty-two-year-old orthopedic surgeon who was struck by lightning and suffered transient unconsciousness. To that point, the doctor had no musical background and did not play the piano. He survived the lightning strike and a few days later noted:

...an insatiable desire to listen to piano music. This was out of keeping with anything in the past. He had had a few piano lessons as a boy, he said, “but no interest.” He did not have a piano in his house...he began to buy [piano]

recordings and became especially enamored of [Chopin]. “I had the desire to play [Chopin]. I ordered all the sheet music...I could hardly read the music, could barely play, but I started to teach myself”

...He got books on notation, and soon realized he needed a music teacher. He would travel to concerts by his favorite performers but had nothing to do with musical friends or musical activities in his own town. This was a solitary pursuit between himself and his muse...He continued to work full-time as a surgeon, but his heart and mind now centered on music.”⁹

Though Sacks does not state how far the doctor advanced in his piano playing, the idea of a sudden change in musical direction after a brain strike intrigued me. At the time I read the story I was struggling with the piano, having taken it up at age 71 with no musical background. That’s when I got the idea for a short story, which just tumbled out of my head. “My Deal With The You Know Who” is about a successful middle-aged writer who starts taking piano lessons and grows frustrated over his lack of progress. He meets the “You Know Who” in a Cleveland deli and agrees to sell his soul in exchange for musical ability. To make the transition from beginner to very good player seem at least plausible to the writer’s circle of friends, I have his sudden musical skill appear after an acute brain injury. The story is published in *What Just Landed in The Villages? and Other Short Fiction*.¹⁰



In 2019 “My Deal With The You Know Who” won a Bronze Medal in Florida Writers Association’s Royal Palm Literary Award contest. Opening paragraphs of the story are in my chapter titled “Larry, can you play anything?”

1. Preface, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat and Other Clinical Tales*, Oliver Sacks, Vintage Books, 1985.
2. Title story, *ibid*.
3. *The New York Times* Book Review, April 1, 1990
<https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1990/04/01/issue.html>
4. <https://americanwritersmuseum.org>
5. *The Guardian*, August 30, 2015.
<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/aug/30/oliver-sacks>
6. Shakespeare, Tom. Book Review: *An Anthropologist on Mars*, *Disability & Society*, 11 (1): 1966, pp. 137-142.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09687599650023416?journalCode=cdo20>
7. *Stories of Intensive Care: Medical Challenges and Ethical Dilemmas in Real Patients*, Lawrence Martin, Lakeside Press, 2020.
8. *The Lancet*, Sept 19, 2015. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(15\)00211-1/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(15)00211-1/fulltext)
9. A Bolt from the Blue: Sudden Musicophilia, in *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain*, Oliver Sacks, Vintage Books, 2007.
10. *What Just Landed in The Villages and Other Short Fiction*. Lakeside Press, 2020.
<https://www.amazon.com/Landed-Villages-Other-Short-Fiction/dp/0997895969/>

Talks: Medical and Non-Medical

Shortly after starting my job as chief of Pulmonary at Cleveland's Mt. Sinai Hospital, I began giving talks on pulmonary subjects. Most of these were delivered to the interns, residents, and medical students, but quite a few were invited talks to outside venues, such as other hospital staffs, and local and national conferences.

Pre-internet, these talks involved a Kodak Carousel with Kodachrome slides, as seen in the photo. Later, when PowerPoint became available, the Carousel was ditched in favor of screen laptop presentations.



In all cases, I talked from the slides. This way I knew what points I wanted to make, and there was no stumbling around to make myself clear. This is not a small point. I have sat through dozens (too many!) lectures where the speaker just rambled, was unclear, and/or his (and sometimes her) slides were difficult to follow.

Mistake No. 1 in a slide presentation: presenting too much data on a single slide. The speaker just copies a page of data from some technical article to make some point. He might say "ignore all the numbers," but then why show them to begin with? Lazy.

Several of my invited lectures were out of town: in 1993 to Japan, and in 2006 and 2008 to India. Other invited lectures were given in Los Angeles and Washington, D.C. (on occupational medicine topics), Des Moines, Iowa (on blood gases), Philadelphia (on asthma and scuba diving), and to several Ohio cities besides Cleveland.

In my career I did not do medical research, so was never considered a true academic pulmonary physician. I was invited because of my books, websites, or because people had heard me speak someplace and thought I would fit into their program.

When I retired and moved to The Villages, I found ample opportunity to continue giving PowerPoint presentations. The Villages (TV) has over 3000 clubs, many of them for educational purposes and open to speakers. At the same time, the amount of expertise among the 135,000 residents spans every conceivable topic, so there are plenty of willing and able speakers -- as long as the subject can be presented to a general audience.

In The Villages I've given the following talks. Only the first two topics are related to my pulmonary specialty. The others covered subjects of interest developed after retiring. The list also includes presentations to the Worldwide Foreign Travel Club. Anyone who has made a foreign trip can present their experience via a slide presentation.

Presentations to Discussion Groups in The Villages

- End of Life Issues (Women Doctors Club)
- Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy (Villages Science Club, Civil Discourse Club)
- Self-publishing: The Good News and the Bad News (to various writing groups)
- Self-Publishing Platforms: Ingram Spark vs. Amazon Kindle (to various writing groups)
- Irving Berlin: How to Explain Genius (Philosophy Club, Humanist Club)
- The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (Humanist Club, Philosophy Club, Civil Discourse Club)
- *The Wall: Chronicle of Scuba Trial* (to a Villages' book club)
- *What Just Landed in The Villages? and Other Short Fiction* (Wine & Words Club)
- Frank Lloyd Wright: His Wives, Lovers, and Buildings (Humanist Club, Philosophy Club, Rotary Club)
- The Cuba Embargo (Civil Discourse Club)
- The Fiction of Ayn Rand: The Nation's Most Controversial Bestselling Author (Philosophy Club)

Presentations to The Villages' Worldwide Foreign Travel Club

- Trip to Cuba
- Touring Israel and Jordan
- Cruising the British Isles
- Trip to Peru, Quito, and the Galapagos
- Touring Israel Pre- and Post- Pandemic

My Talks on Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy and "Reverse Aging"

Why would anyone in a retirement community be interested in a talk on Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy (HBOT)? And why does a retired doctor, already in his late 70s, want to spend time preparing it? Why doesn't he just *relax*?

This book exists because I never stopped writing and, when the opportunity presented itself, to teach. Teaching was part of my medial career; it's why I took the hospital-based job at Mt. Sinai Hospital in 1976, instead of going into private practice. I gave hundreds of talks over my career, and when I retired, saw no reason to stop. So, when HBOT came to The Villages, I grabbed it as another opportunity to teach.

You might be interested in HBOT if you scuba dive. Scuba divers who ascend too fast from depth are subject to the bends, and the treatment is HBOT. All certified divers are taught about the bends, or "decompression sickness," in their training course. Popular dive sites like Grand Cayman Island, Bonaire, and Nassau have hyperbaric chambers ready to treat divers' bends 24/7. The affected diver goes into the airtight chamber, and is given 100% oxygen to breathe while the air pressure is increased, usually to twice normal. The extra oxygen and increased pressure shrink the nitrogen bubbles that cause the pain of the bends.

While TV has many active scuba divers, scuba diving was not the reason I developed a PowerPoint presentation on HBOT. The impetus was a unique facility that opened in TV the summer of 2020: *the world's largest hyperbaric oxygen facility*.

There are two types of hyperbaric chambers, monoplace and multiplace. As the names imply, monoplace is for one person at a time. Multiplace chambers can hold several patients, up to fourteen in some units. The vast majority of hyperbaric chambers in the world are monoplace. Examples of each are shown below; the slides are from my talks on HBOT.



Monoplace hyperbaric oxygen chamber. This is a chamber built for one patient at a time. The patients slides int o the chamber and it is slowly pressurized with 100% oxygen.

www.hyperbaricflorida.com



Multiplace hyperbaric oxygen chamber. The patient sits in a comfortable chair or recliner. Oxygen is delivered through a face mask or a clear hood placed over the head.

<https://aviv-clinics.com/>

The Aviv facility – a series of four multiplace chambers – occupies part of a large specialty clinic building in The Villages. It was designed by an Israeli firm, AVIV, with the goal of reversing some of the normal aging processes at the cellular level. This type of treatment is now advertised as “HBOT for reverse aging.”

There is no greater collection of seniors in one location than The Villages, so AVIV determined it would be a good location for its first U.S. facility. The program consists of three months of daily (M-F) two-hour HBOT sessions, to reverse some of the normal aging processes in our body. It is not medical therapy, is not covered by Medicare or any insurance plan, and the cost is approximately \$55,000 for the entire program (which involves extensive pre- and post-testing

I first heard about this program in early 2020, just before the pandemic shut everything down. An Israeli physician-scientist, Dr. Shai Efrati, was in TV giving a talk about his research that formed the basis for the new facility, and of course my interest was piqued.

I was certainly familiar with HBOT, being a scuba diver myself and having written about it in *Scuba Diving Explained*. Dr. Efrati’s talk was for a general audience, but I had questions on physiology and pathology. After his talk I arranged to meet him at his hotel, to find out more about this new venture. At the time he was fifty, and had been doing research on HBOT for well over a decade. In fact he gave a 15-minute TED talk on his research back in 2015, available online, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1TEYTNi9UEo>.

His research (along with other scientists) has shown that many of the normal aging processes, at the cellular level, were improved after three months of HBOT. He himself had gone through the treatment program in his late 40s, to (hopefully) slow down the aging process.

After the meeting he sent me scientific articles which I reviewed. The AVIV facility opened on schedule in the summer of 2020, the worst possible time as the pandemic and shutdowns were in full force. Still, I was able to take a tour of the facility, which consists of four separate rooms, each holding 14 patient stations. In theory, up to 56 people could be treated at one time. It is the ultimate “multi-place” hyperbaric chamber.

After reviewing many of the scientific papers and seeing the facility, I decided to create a PowerPoint presentation about HBOT to a general audience, giving the history and current medically-approved uses, and finishing with the latest research on “reverse aging.” I have since given this talk several times in The Villages. I am in no way connected with the Aviv clinic, and keep my talk objective and non-judgmental about the latest therapies. The first slide from the latest talk, given at The Villages Science and Technology Club, is below.

HYPERBARIC OXYGEN THERAPY

Dec 26, 2022 – The Villages Science and Technology Club
Lawrence Martin, M.D.
(Retired pulmonary medicine physician)
Email: drlarry437@gmail.com

“Hyperbaric”: Pressure above sea level atmospheric pressure

Part 1: HBO Therapy – What is it?

Part 2: Medical Uses of HBOT – for conditions FDA-approved and not-FDA-approved

Part 3: HBOT for healthy people: “Reverse Aging” and the AVIV Facility at Brownwood Specialty Clinics

For those interested, the slides from this talk are online at
<https://sites.google.com/view/villagesst/presenters?authuser=0#h.xokntopyogsp>.

Self-publishing: The Good and the Bad News

I've given a talk on this title several times in The Villages. The PowerPoint slides are online at <http://www.lakesidepress.com/SelfPublishing.pdf>. In my assessment the good and bad news about self-publishing are the same.

The good news is that it's easy to do.

The bad news is that it's easy to do.

Below are two slides from this talk, starting with the "good news." In the second slide "TV" stands for "The Villages."

Self-publishing: The Good News

- **If you write a book, easy to get it published and listed for sale on Amazon. Most self-published authors use Amazon's free Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP) platform, but other platforms are also available.**
- This is "light-years" better than pre-internet
 - No need to take delivery of a thousand books, or deal with a scammy self-publishing company
- Can self-publish your book at no or low-cost, depending on your own skills at cover design, formatting, and editing.
 - For the best result, expect to spend some \$\$ self-publishing your book.

Spectrum of options to get your book into publishable format:


| | | |
|---------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|
| Do-it-yourself----- | Free lancers----- | One-stop self-publishing company |
| \$0 | \$ to \$\$ | \$\$\$ to \$\$\$\$ |

- 1) Hire individual free lancers for each job you want (editing, formatting, cover design, etc.). They are listed all over the internet. Also on fiverr.com. Talk to other writers who have used free lancers.
- 2) Go with a legitimate self-publishing company that will do everything, typically at \$2-4K. To find one, MUST DO YOUR RESEARCH. **Many self-publishing companies are scammers.** They overcharge by thousands, and control your copyright. Their business model is based only on selling stuff to *you*, and *not* on selling your book to the public.
 - Google "Self-publishing companies to avoid."
 - Talk to other writers who have used a self-publishing company. Many self-published authors in TV.

Basically, if you are willing to lay out a few bucks, and have some initiative, you can publish your book and have it for sale online easily. Pre-internet, this was not possible. In 1991, my first self-published book, *Pickwickian*, was printed by a local company, and then I had to take delivery of over 1000 copies! There was no print-on-demand, no Amazon.com or outlet for sales of self-published books. Now, the situation is very different. A self-published book need only be printed when it is ordered, so no need to stock inventory. However, the relative ease of getting to this point – compared to pre-internet – is not always a good situation.

Below is one of the slides about the bad news.


Self-publishing: The Bad News



- **If you write a book, easy to get it published and listed for sale on Amazon**

As result:

- Consensus: @ 90% of self-published books are poorly written, poorly formatted, and/or poorly edited (google “bad self-published books”).
- @ 2 million self-published books every year; your book is unlikely to be reviewed, carried in book stores, or sell enough to make any money.
- Professional help in producing your book is recommended. However, let me repeat: **You need to be hyper-vigilant not to be ripped off by people who prey on authors wishing to self-publish.**



There are many companies looking for the self-published author’s business, and some are to be avoided. The legitimate ones charge basically for the production of the book, and give the author a fair deal; their business model is to make money if the book is successful.

There are also self-publishing companies whose business model is NOT to sell books to the public, but only to the author, at a “discount” from an inflated retail price, one the public will likely never pay. Companies with this business model will also barrage you with offers to buy publicity packages, and even worse, the “opportunity” to have your book reviewed for optioning by Hollywood producers. Or, you get a come-on that your book is great for the movies, and all you need do is have a professional write the screenplay, at your expense. Avoid these companies and “screenplay” offers like the plague. Their scam nature can usually be uncovered by a detailed internet search but, as the slide states, you have to be hyper-vigilant. For a good start, check out “Writer Beware” at <https://writerbeware.blog/>.



In the slide above, note the three main problems encountered with self-published books: poor writing, poor editing, and poor formatting. As you have probably noticed, the first two

faults are not uncommon in traditionally-published books; you are not alone if you have wondered how some traditionally-published book came to see the light of day. However, unlike issues with writing and editing, poor formatting is mainly found in self-published books.

It is not easy to format a 300-page print book to look right, with proper page numbers, paragraphing, headers and/or footers. I always pay someone to do this task, as the learning curve using Word is frightful. (Formatting is not so critical in e-books, where there are no page numbers, headers, or footers.) Using the internet, it is easy to find people to do the job for a reasonable fee. One popular source to look for help is fiverr.com.

You may not be able to judge a book by its cover, but you likely can judge the overall quality by how it looks *inside*. Go to any book fair that includes self-published authors, skim through some books and my bet is you can tell which ones were formatted professionally. An author who doesn't pay close attention to the interior look may also not care too much about the editing or the proofreading. Some indicators of poor formatting:

- No page numbers (it happens)
- Extra line spacing making the book longer than necessary
- No headers or footers.
- Variable use of tabs for indenting paragraphs
- Inside margins too close to the binding, making it difficult to read some text
- Font that is too tiny to read comfortably
- Unusual font for a book (e.g., courier) or one that is not easy to read (e.g., arial narrow).

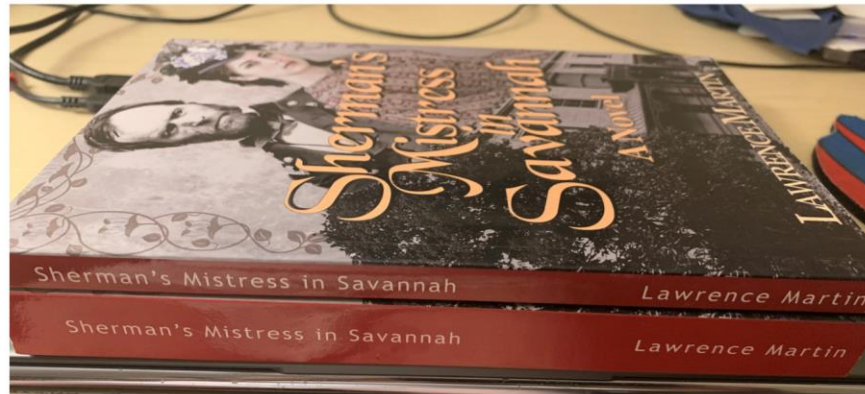
Below are three fonts: traditional 12-point times roman, followed by courier and arial narrow.

- The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.
- The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.
- The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.

Sometimes poor formatting can happen despite the author's best intentions. In 2012 I paid to have my first Civil War novel, *Sherman's Mistress in Savannah*, professionally formatted. I uploaded the formatted file to amazon's CreateSpace, then the self-publishing platform of Amazon.com (it has since been folded into Kindle Direct Publishing).

Fortunately, I requested a proof copy before listing the book for sale. Imagine my surprise when I received a very thin copy of this 384-page book. Surprise turned to shock when I looked inside. The print was so small it was barely readable! Did anyone at CreateSpace even look at the book before sending it? I called to report the problem and within a week or so I received another proof, this one properly formatted – and twice as thick. The picture below shows the two proof copies, with an example of the Preface from each.

Whether or not you self-publish, always request a proof copy of your book before it goes on sale.



Preface

Sherman's Mistress in Savannah is a work of historical fiction. The history part revolves around the occupation of Savannah by General William Tecumseh Sherman and his Union army December 1864 – January 1865. Characters in the story include many real people besides Sherman: Brig-General John W. Geary, Major Henry Hitchcock, Mayor Richard Arnold, Josephine Clay Habersham, Fanny Yates Cohen, Lt. Cornelius Platter, Englishman Charles Green, businessman Gazaway Bugg Lamar, Reverend Garrison Frazier, Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton and others. Though of necessity all dialogue is invented, the general outline of events is a matter of historical record. Many of these people left written documents, such as Sherman's *Memoirs*, the correspondence of war generals, and the diaries of Cohen, Platter and Hitchcock. In the book passages from historical documents are in bold face and bracketed by asterisks.

Preface

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Apart from the writing itself, the key elements to publishing a quality book – and for me that require professional help – are cover design, proofreading, and formatting. Let's assume these elements are taken care of and your book is offered at a fair price on Amazon and other outlets. Now comes some more bad news: marketing is a bitch.

Self-publishing: Some More Bad News

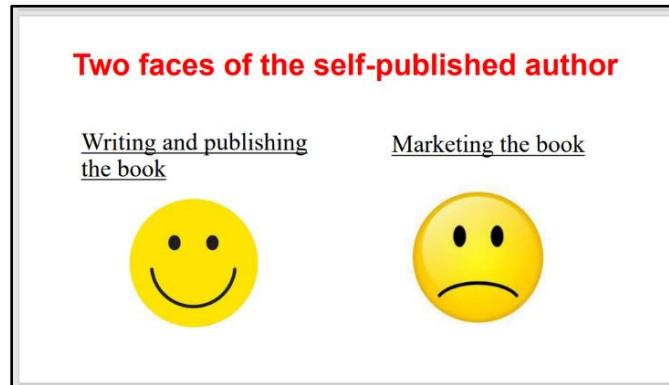
For most self-published authors:

Writing is the **easier task**

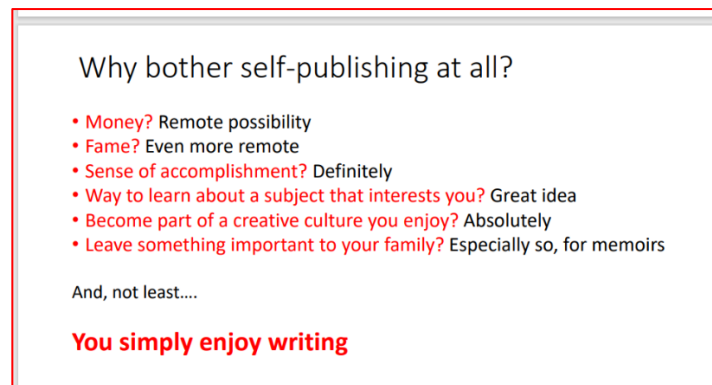
Marketing your book is the **harder task**

- Most self-published authors put little effort/money into marketing.
- Marketing via social media is time-intensive and difficult.
- For each self-published book, the average no. of books sold is 250 total.
- Companies that sell “promotion packages” typically charge \$Sthousands, and are almost guaranteed to be a waste of money.

Marketing is expensive, time consuming, and chances are any money you spend on this task is not going to be recouped in book sales. Hence, the two emojis for the self-published author.



I don't end my talk on a downer, but ask this question.



The answers provided help explain why we have so many self-published authors in our retirement community, and by extension, all over the country: some two million self-published books a year. I've yet to meet anyone who went to the effort/expense of self-publishing and regretted the effort.

The keys to self-publishing:

1) Make the writing as good as you can: write-get feedback-rewrite;

2) Decide on one of three basic paths to producing the book:

a) do it all yourself;

b) hire freelance help as needed for editing, proofreading, cover design, and/or formatting;

c) research to find a "self-publishing company" for all tasks, one that has a good reputation and an acceptable business model.

Expect pitfalls, unforeseen expenses, and snafus along the way, However, if you are committed to see your book published, it truly is "easy" when compared to the pre-internet era.

Once your book is published, then comes the hard part: marketing. Good luck!

January 2020 – Publishing Issues Just Before Covid Lockdown

There was news about Covid-19 infections in January 2020, but we certainly had no idea of the devastation it was about to wreak. January was a busy month for me, as I worked to put out two books, in both print and e-book formats.

While self-publishing is certainly easier than before the internet, there are pitfalls and potential snafus, and I've encountered a lot of them. My journal entries for early January 2020 are filled with frustrations in trying to get two new books published: *Stories of Intensive Care* and *What Just Landed in The Villages? and Other Short Fiction*.

Writers League of The Villages' annual book fair was coming up the end of January, and I wanted to have print copies for display and sale. Aggravation toward this goal started in late 2019, when I hired a company to format *What Just Landed?* for print publication. As discussed in the previous chapter, formatting means putting in page numbers, headers, chapter breaks, and a host of other features needed to make the book look like a book. Good formatting is critical and I can't do it myself. I paid several hundred dollars to this company, and they blew it. Totally. They delayed sending me any results, and when I finally received their work product, it had a ton of mistakes. For a few weeks, I went back and forth with the formatter, but he never sent an error-free version. He was simply incompetent for the task.

I demanded a refund. The formatter's boss asked for another chance. I refused, and stated I was going to contact Paypal to get the refund and explain on the internet that they were incompetent. Here is part of my last email to the company.

I don't know what the basic problem is with [company name], but I clearly made a mistake going with your company. Delay after delay, broken promise after broken promise by [your formatter], and persistent subpar formatting, have made this a frustrating experience. At this point I would like a refund of my payment, and with that I will consider the matter closed. I don't have another month to wait on more revisions which will likely still not be up to professional standards.

Please reply that you will or will not issue the refund. If not, then I will try to obtain the refund from Paypal, for services undelivered. And, let others know about my disappointing experience with [your company].

To my surprise, on January 3, 2020, the company credited my PayPal account with the amount I had paid, and the matter was closed. I had already hired a local formatter for both books, and was ready to publish them in print and e-book versions. On January 7, 2020 I wrote the following summary of my efforts to date.

Summary of publishing efforts:

ICU e-book: Published on D2D Jan 6, 2020, being sent to sales channels.

ICU print book: Uploaded on KDP Jan 7, 2020, waiting for final approval.
LANDED e-book: Being distributed via D2D, half the sales channels accepted so far.
LANDED print book: Have proof copy, waiting on publication by KDP, then will order copies.

Behind this summary was a mountain of frustration apart from the formatting issue with the *What Just Landed* book. I was dealing with two books, two versions for each, and two different publishing platforms: D2D and Amazon's KDP.

D2D is Draft to Digital, which can place your e-book with multiple sales outlets, including Apple, Barnes & Noble, and many others. All, that is, except Amazon, with which D2D competes.

KDP is Amazon's Kindle Direct Publishing, which can produce your book in both print and e-book formats. But, with KDP, your e-book is only for sale by Amazon, and I wanted the wider distribution for the e-books. To go with D2D for both e-books, I also had to separately upload the e-book file to KDP for Amazon.

Confused? So was I. It took a while to figure all this out. Company policies may all be changed by the time you read this, but in January 2020 I had worked with two separate platforms. I tried to do this all by myself, and on multiple occasions the uploading software didn't work, and I had to contact the companies. Sometimes I had a formatting issue, sometimes there was just a glitch in their software. Finally, I got it all to work.

Here is the screen shot of the ICU book showing the channels where the ICU e-book can be purchased. Note that Amazon is not listed, because it competes with D2D. But the book is also available in Amazon as print and e-book, as also shown below.



Look inside

LAWRENCE MARTIN, M.D.

STORIES OF
**INTENSIVE
CARE**
Medical Challenges and
Ethical Dilemmas in Real Patients

Stories of Intensive Care: Medical Challenges and Ethical Dilemmas in Real Patients
Paperback – January 7, 2020
by Lawrence Martin M.D. (Author)
★★★★★ 4 ratings

See all formats and editions

| | |
|---|--|
| Kindle \$3.99 Read with Our Free App | Paperback \$10.99 ✓prime 2 Used from \$11.49 7 New from \$10.99 |
|---|--|

"Stories of Intensive Care" is a series of 23 stories about real patients cared for in the intensive care unit. The author, a retired pulmonary (lung) physician, directed the Mt. Sinai Hospital of Cleveland's Medical Intensive Care Unit (MICU) in the 1980s and 1990s. Each story highlights a medical challenge or ethical dilemma he encountered. The first chapter gives an overview of intensive care rounds, how the MICU operates, and what happens, when, during MICU rounds,

In summary, by the second week of January 2020, I was able to publish both digital and print versions of the two books. The lesson here?

If you plan to self-publish, there are always going to be some glitches when you do it yourself. Expect them.

- There is a learning curve: about different platforms, about formatting requirements, book cover requirements, and other issues.
- The software from these platforms often does not work like it's supposed to, or the directions are confusing and difficult to follow.
- Not all companies are responsive, or responsive in a reasonable time frame.

For these reasons, many self-published authors go with a self-publishing company (some good, some terrible) or hire a freelancer to get their book uploaded to whatever platform(s) they choose.

There is no right or wrong here. Well, there is a wrong here: choosing a company whose business model is not to sell books to the public, but to sell books and services to you, the author. This has been discussed in another chapter.

Our writing club's book fair was held on January 26, 2020, from 11 to 4 pm. Eighty authors had display tables, and over 2500 Villagers attended. I sold about 25 books, mostly *Liberty Street* and *What Just Landed*, plus a few of the ICU books. The ICU book attracted some doctors who introduced themselves (three total, but none bought the book), and several ICU nurses (one bought it).

I sold only one *Gravity* book and two *Boy Who Dreamed Mount Everest* books. Not until 2 pm did I even show the *Out of Time* book, and sold one of those. I also displayed *Consenting Adults Only*, but sold none. I only had space for 3 display posters, so advertised *Intensive Care*, *Liberty Street*, and *What Just Landed*.



Covid-19 in The Villages, FL

The Villages was impacted like the rest of the world by Covid 19. Having an elderly population (average age 66) we had our share of deaths and illness from the virus. Hospitals were stressed, and routine outpatient visits were conducted via Zoom. On Thursday, March 12, 2020, I described the situation in my journal.

March 12, 2020

The world is collapsing about us. Where to begin? The virus is spreading rapidly, and cities are shutting down, schools closing, colleges stopping all classes, and the NBA has canceled the season. The NCAA basketball “March Madness” will play in empty arenas, with only family members permitted. The Players Championship is on this week at Ponte Vedra Beach, with a good crowd – today only. Starting tomorrow, there will be no spectators.

Joanna [our oldest daughter, who is a physician and lives in Chicago] has cancelled their trip here next week. She thinks Disneyworld will close soon, and in any case doesn’t want to chance the plane ride. On the phone this morning she implored us NOT to go to any group meetings. She says we’re highly vulnerable, and points to the large number of deaths and ventilator patients in Italy, where the whole country is on lockdown.

We went to see “The Producers” last night, and the Savannah Center [a large Villages theater] was packed. We were there over 3 hours, got home 10:15. The play was enjoyable, though a little long.

We’re supposed to go to [a social club] meeting this Saturday night, for a comedy show. Will probably not go now. Also have tickets to see Uke Orchestra of Great Britain later this month.

Starting the second week in March 2020, all in-person club meetings were either canceled or held via Zoom. The one activity that remained open was golf, with some minor adjustments. All golf course water fountains were shut down. Only one person was allowed per golf cart unless the two people lived together. We don’t own a golf cart, and always walk the short executive courses. Thus, during the peak of the pandemic we were still able to play regularly and get our exercise. When we ended up playing with another couple, everyone was careful to maintain a safe distance.

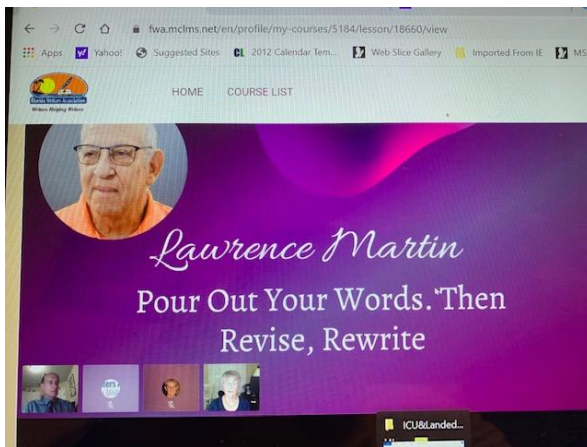
For our 50th anniversary, July 4, 2020, we had booked a Baltic Sea cruise on Viking Cruise Lines. It was to leave from Bergen, Norway, make several stops along the way to St. Petersburg, Russia, and then return to Stockholm. Of course, it was canceled. Everything travel-related was canceled in the summer of 2020. We spent our 50th at home in Florida. Ruth made herself a salad and I think I had a hamburger. The kids called via FaceTime to wish us a happy anniversary. At least we had our health. (We re-booked the same trip for 2021. That, too was canceled.)

The vast majority of Villages residents signed up for the first vaccine as soon as it became available, in January 2021. Ditto the second vaccine, and then all three boosters as soon as they became available. Earlier than most states, Florida lifted its mask requirements. In-person meetings resumed for many Villages clubs in early 2021.

Writing activity was impacted by Covid in several ways. In addition to switching to Zoom for critique club meetings, our annual book fairs were canceled in both January 2021 and January 2022. The first cancellation in 2021 was a slam-dunk; no one was attending any large in-person gathering. The second one was carefully planned, and we had 100 local authors signed up for a table to sell their books. Then in early December 2021, there was a surge in Covid cases, and the fair planners grew nervous. Some authors began dropping out. Would anyone even come if we held the fair? It was a close call, but in the end the planners decided to cancel it, and refund all the payments. What a bummer.

Florida Writers Association's annual October convention in Altamonte Springs, near Orlando, was also canceled 2020 and 2021. FWA still held the annual awards "banquet," via Zoom. No food at these zoom banquets, just announcements of the winners. One unexpected delight was watching the October 17, 2020 awards presentation on Zoom, while visiting our middle daughter in Hastings-on-Hudson, New York. (This was our first out-of-town trip since November 2019, and was done carefully, with some trepidation. Mask and plastic hood on the airplane. Daily check-ins with Westchester Country health authorities to assure we were symptom-free. And, we had our own rental apartment nearby.)

The night of the awards I sat on their couch with my laptop, and eagerly waited for the announcements. I was a finalist in three categories and knew there was a chance I would win nothing. Turns out two of the three entries were winners, and when the announcements were made there were congrats all around. My son-in-law took pics of the screen, shown below.



- An Ordinary Patient – Silver Award for Published Short Story
- Pour Out Your Words. Then Revise, Rewrite – Bronze Award for Published Blog

When I won Silver in the published short story category for "An Ordinary Patient," my son-in-law videoed the host Chris Hamilton mentioning that I was a doctor and have won several

awards previously for short stories. So that was gratifying to win two out of three, and have the announcements made while watching the event in our daughter's house.

Speaking of food during 2020, there was outdoor dining during the peak of the pandemic with wait staff all wearing masks. All indoor concerts were canceled, and movie theaters were closed. We watched a lot of Netflix, and got to see the play "Hamilton" for the first time, on Disney Plus.

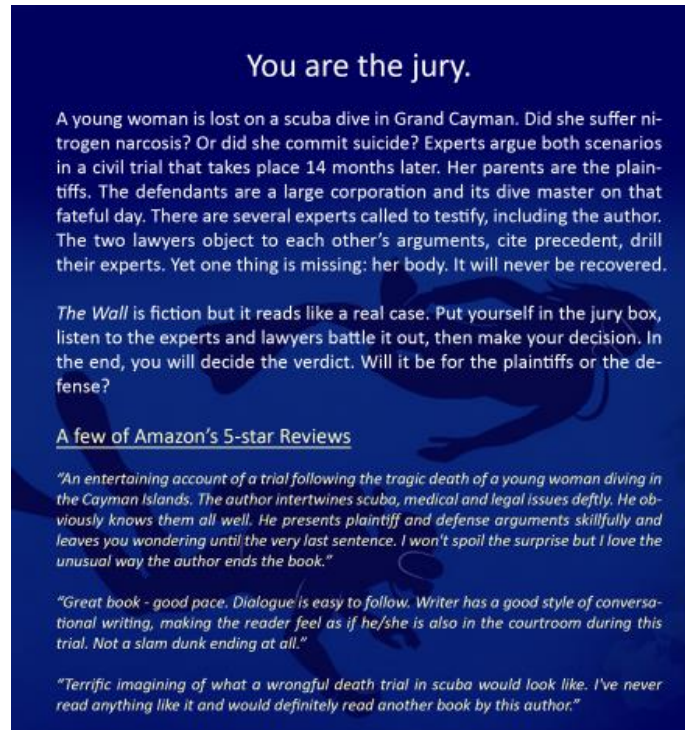
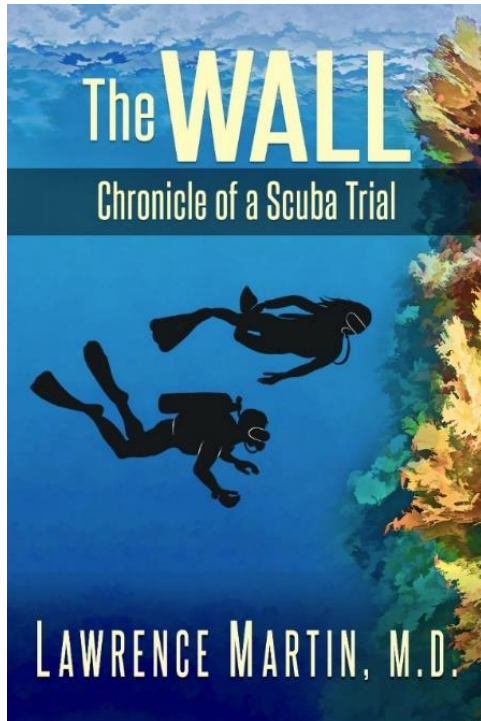
Going to Zoom was not a problem for my writing critique group. We still submitted our work via email before each meeting, and the critiques went on as before.

The situation was very different for music groups. Given the delays in transmission, there was no way to hold group music sessions, and they were all canceled. As were the annual folk festivals in this part of Florida.

Those who kept their health felt fortunate to get through the closures. By the end of 2021, with the vast majority of residents vaccinated, concert venues, restaurants, and movie theaters mostly reopened.

It seems that Covid accelerated home sales in Florida, including The Villages. Added to the usual reasons for retiring to Florida – northern weather, taxes, and big-city crime – was a new reason: people realized they could work from home, and it didn't matter where they lived. Many seniors not yet retired could still work remotely, with less restrictions, less taxes, and better weather. So, home construction boomed in The Villages.

The Wall: Print and Audible Editions



In 2020 I decided to bring out a print edition of *The Wall*, using Amazon’s KDP platform. For e-books all you need is a front cover. To upload the file for a print edition, I arranged for a back cover as well, from the same person who did the e-book cover. To the back cover I added the needed book blurb, as shown above. I included a few of the 5-star Amazon reviews.

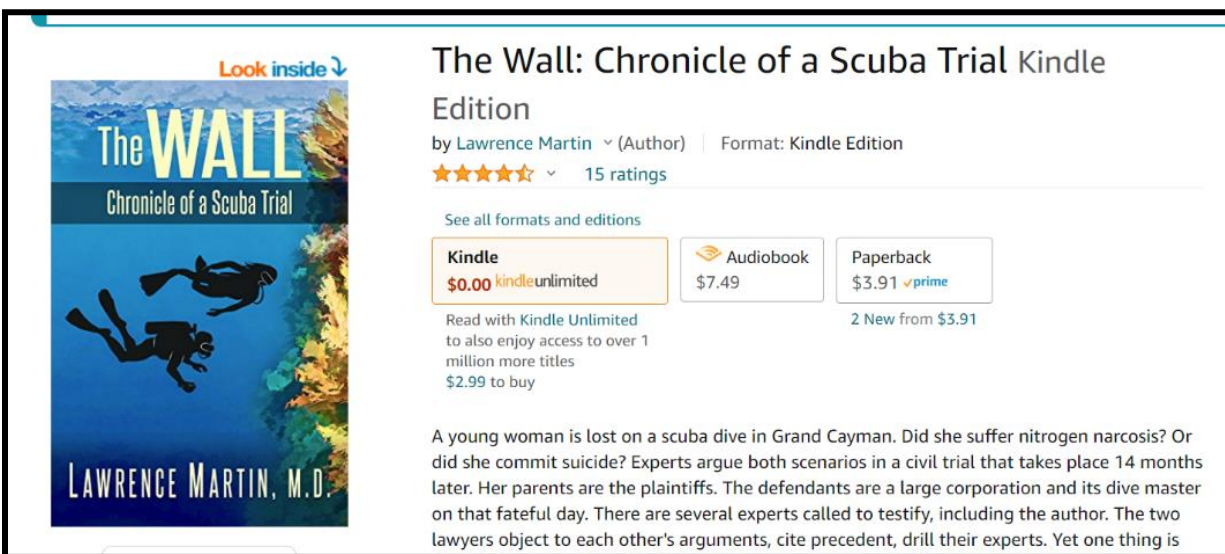
Next came the audiobook. To that point I had never done an audiobook. Amazon owns audible.com, which is set up so you can upload a page or two of your book, and allow narrators submit audio readings. You listen to them, and if you find one you like you contact the narrator and sign that person to do the book. Audible makes the whole process relatively easy.

The downside is the cost. There are two payment plans. One you pay a full fee to the narrator, and keep all the profits from Audible sales. Two, you pay a lower fee, and share the profits with the narrator.

I chose the latter, realizing that it was highly unlikely I would recoup the cost either way. I went through five different narrators and finally chose Mark Bielecki, a Michigan native who had done many other audiobooks. We agreed on a flat fee of \$500, and he would share in any book sales.

Basically, I wanted experience with audio books, and this was the right one to start with. It is short and has lots of dialogue. Most audio books use only one narrator, for men and women characters, so that wasn't an issue. He did a great job, and in addition (much to my chagrin) found a couple of typos I missed in the print edition. I fixed those and uploaded a corrected file.

The book is now available in three editions: Kindle e-book, Audiobook, and paperback. It's the only one of my books in audio, and I have no current plans to do another one.



The Wall: Chronicle of a Scuba Trial Kindle Edition

by Lawrence Martin (Author) | Format: Kindle Edition

★★★★☆ 15 ratings

See all formats and editions

| | | |
|---|----------------------------|---|
| Kindle \$0.00 <small>Kindle Unlimited</small> | Audiobook \$7.49 | Paperback \$3.91 <small>Prime</small> |
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A young woman is lost on a scuba dive in Grand Cayman. Did she suffer nitrogen narcosis? Or did she commit suicide? Experts argue both scenarios in a civil trial that takes place 14 months later. Her parents are the plaintiffs. The defendants are a large corporation and its dive master on that fateful day. There are several experts called to testify, including the author. The two lawyers object to each other's arguments, cite precedent, drill their experts. Yet one thing is

Postscript

In 2020 I submitted the newly published print version to RPLA in the category “published novella.” It won a bronze medal in 2021.

Trips during Covid – Meeting Irving Berlin (1888-1989)

Covid scotched a long-planned and fully paid-for 50th-anniversary cruise on the Baltic Sea. Instead, on that date (July 4, 2020) we stayed home in Florida, and did Facetime video with our kids and grandkids.

Whereas pre-covid we were doing several trips a year (including family visits), between November 2019 and October 2020 we had gone...nowhere. Travel lockdown! By October we had had enough of only seeing our family via FaceTime.

In October Ruth and I made our first overnight trip out of the Villages since the pandemic started, to visit our middle daughter and her family in Hastings on Hudson, NY. This was before the vaccines were available, and for safety we stayed in a rental apartment near their home, and wore masks everywhere.

In the airport at White Plains, we had to deposit a form giving our address, email, and phone contact info. Then, we had to check in periodically with the health dept about our status.

Hastings is one of these cute Hudson River towns, just north of Yonkers. You could film a 1950s-era movie downtown and never have to change any of the storefronts. Just replace the cars with older models. Hastings is quaint, quiet, and a short train ride from Manhattan. It's also part of the Hudson River Valley, which has beautiful scenery and great hiking on both sides of the river. We did several hikes with the family and wore masks everywhere.

The local weekly newspaper stated there would be a Zoom library talk by Hastings author James Kaplan, about his new book on Irving Berlin (published November 2019). Kaplan was well known for his two-volume biography of Frank Sinatra, and had been chosen by Yale University Press to write about Berlin for its Jewish Lives series. I knew very little about Berlin except that he was a popular songwriter of the early 20th century, a Jewish immigrant from Russia, and that he wrote "White Christmas" and "God Bless America."

On October 25, 2020, after lunch at our daughter's house, I watched the Zoom presentation. It went for an hour, 2 to 3 pm, and Kaplan only got up to WWII in Berlin's life. Berlin would live another four decades, dying at age 101, in 1989. The talk piqued my interest and I ordered Kaplan's book from Amazon.

I can't help myself when I get hooked on a subject. From scuba to golf, from music theory to voyaging to Mars, each time I go through a period of research and book acquisition, followed (or concomitant with) writing about the subject. The writing can be a non-fiction book (*Scuba*

Diving Explained), a fictional story (*Journey to Mars*), or an extensive website posting (*Basic Music Theory for the Piano*).

Fast forward. Within six months I had acquired and read *every* biography of Berlin available on Amazon, starting with one by his friend Alexander Woolcott, written when Berlin was only 35. The bios also include one by his daughter Mary Ellin Barrett.

The six biographies were not enough, and here the internet proved indispensable. I was able to view or hear dozens of performances of Berlin's music on YouTube, including the original recording of God Bless America, by Kate Smith. I even downloaded one of Berlin's movies, *You're in the Army Now*, starring Ronald Regan. I also found lyrics for many songs (he wrote over 1500).

I was simply fascinated about how this poor Jewish immigrant from Russia (his family came over when he was 5), a junior high school dropout with no musical training, could grow up to become what many people call America's greatest composer.

So, I began to write about his life and music. The result is a four-part review on Berlin that I posted on the internet, at www.lakesidepress.com/IrvingBerlin.pdf. Below is a screenshot of the website Introduction.

The subtitle of Kaplan's book is "New York Genius," which I totally agree with. In my review, titled "Irving Berlin: How to explain his genius?", I seek to provide some insight into how this uneducated immigrant could become such a great songwriter. I make an attempt at answering the question, and if you're curious, check out the last page.

I didn't stop with the internet essay, and next created a PowerPoint presentation on the composer, which I have since presented in The Villages.

An offshoot of my research is that I learned much about great performers of the early 20th century: Ethel Merman, Donald O'Connor, Judy Garland, Frank Sinatra, Ginger Rogers, Kate Smith, and others. I came across a performance by Merman and O'Connor from the movie made of the 1950 Broadway play "Call Me Madam" that brings tears to my eyes every time I watch it. "You're just in Love" is a duet that Berlin wrote over just two nights, to spice up the second act of the play during its New England previews. *Two nights*. Watch it here.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2LAijDQ2cIE>

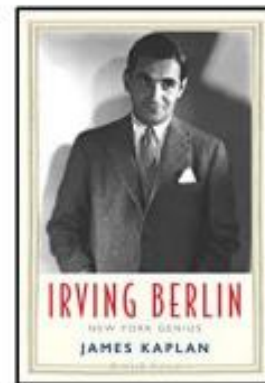
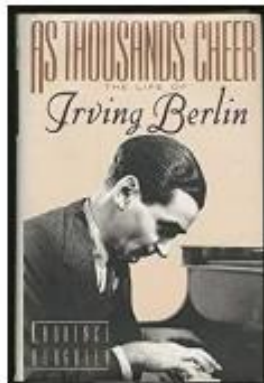
When Berlin first played the song for Merman, she reportedly quipped, "Irving, we'll never get off the stage." She was right. In the opening night performance in Boston the audience demanded seven encores.

Speaking of tears in your eyes, listen to Kate Smith's recording of "God Bless America," first aired in 1938. It includes Berlin's haunting introduction, rarely played when the song is sung today. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1rKQReqJZg>

Introduction

This 4-Part review of Irving Berlin (1888-1989), his life and music, is mainly for people who have little knowledge of the Jewish immigrant, whom many consider America's greatest songwriter. They may know he wrote "White Christmas," and perhaps one or two other songs, but little else. I was of this group until I read a biography titled [*Irving Berlin: New York Genius*](#), by James Kaplan (2019). That led me to five other Berlin biographies, published between 1925 and 1999.

- [*The Story of Irving Berlin*](#), by his friend Alexander Woolcott, published in 1925, when Berlin was only 36 years old
- [*As Thousands Cheer*](#), by Laurence Bergreen (1990)
- [*Irving Berlin – A Daughter's Memoir*](#), by his oldest daughter Ellin Berlin Barrett, published in 1994, five years after his death
- [*Irving Berlin: A Life in Song*](#), by Philip Furia (1998)
- [*Irving Berlin: American Troubadour*](#), by Edward Jablonski (1999)



From my research, I also gained a greater appreciation of other early twentieth-century composers, several of whom I name and compare with Berlin: Jerome Kern, Cole Porter, Harry Warren, George Gershwin, Richard Rodgers, Harold Arlen, and Jule Styne.

This was an effort in self-education, and am delighted I tuned into Kaplan's talk. The experience reinforces a theme frequently expressed in this memoir, one that I will repeat here. "If you want to learn a subject in depth, do research and write about it. A story, an article, a website, or a book." Added to this list is to give a talk on the subject. Writing and speaking about a subject will make you ask questions and seek answers you likely would not pursue from just reading.

Postscript: comparing Irving Berlin to Bob Dylan

Like Berlin, Bob Dylan (b. 1941) also wrote his own music and lyrics. Unlike Berlin's lyrics, Dylan's are often complex pieces of poetry, for which he won the 2016 Nobel Prize in literature. They can't be quoted here, as "fair use" does not apply to even a few lines of copyrighted song lyrics (except the title). However, they are all over the internet; just Google "Bob Dylan lyrics."

Awarding Dylan the Nobel Prize set off a debate in some circles, about whether song lyrics have the same artistic value as poetry or novels. Interesting debate. We tend to think of "writers" as people who write prose, but of course poets and playwrights are writers also. The only "debate," really, is if you want to consider lyrics – Dylan's especially -- as "literature." Irving Berlin's lyrics would probably not be considered literature, nor for that matter the words of Oscar Hammerstein II, Cole Porter, Ira Gershwin or Alan Jay Lerner. And why not? Or, a better-framed question, why Dylan's?

The answer – if there is to be one – is the nature of the lyrics, the message they convey. Berlin and other great composers of musical theater strove to write lyrics with an unambiguous message, one immediately clear to the audience. Dylan's lyrics often have subtle meaning, or are subject to interpretation; they make you think. Hence, "literature."

So, which is better? The simplistic, unambiguous lyrics of Irving Berlin, or the metaphorical, often-allegorical lyrics of Dylan?

Foolish question, really asked to make a point. Tastes change, styles change, and what appeals to one generation may not appeal to later generations. We have Dickens and Mark Twain, popular generations after their death, In contrast, English writer Charles Hamilton (1876-1961) reportedly wrote over 100 million words, and was the creator of the popular Billy Bunter series. Does anyone read him today? And then there is Pearl Buck, a 1938 Nobel laureate, also out of popularity.

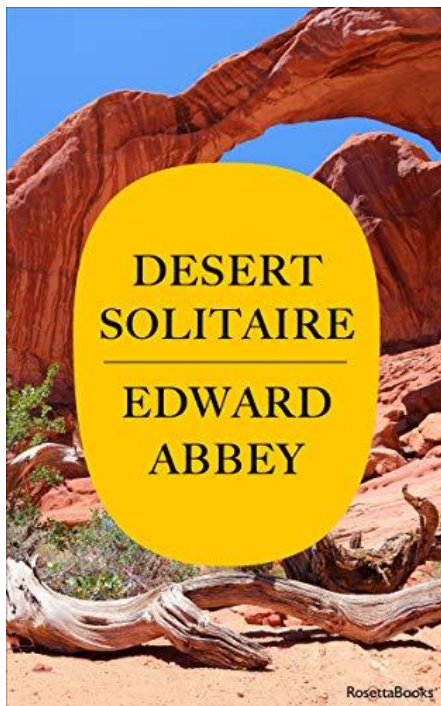
For me, the music of Irving Berlin is timeless, and will survive. Maybe the same is true of Dylan as well. They are very different, and it is impossible – in music or literature – to predict how tastes will change.

Trips During Covid: meeting Edward Abbey (1927-1989)

Prolific Writer, Anarchist, Professor, Environmentalist, Alcoholic, Philanderer

I had never heard of Ed Abbey until a Sept 2021 Road Scholar trip to Arches National Park in southern Utah. Arches is an amazing –and very popular – NP, full of natural formations hollowed out of sandstone. In a lead-in to the park, our tour guide mentioned something to the group like, “Ed Abbey wrote about his experience here as a ranger years ago. You might find his book interesting.”

I didn’t remember the book’s title if our guide mentioned it, only the author -- a guy named Abbey. Later, while browsing through the Arches Visitors Center, I saw the one book they had by him, a paperback titled *Desert Solitaire*, and bought it. I was surprised to see it was originally published in 1968, and has since been reissued several times. It’s non-fiction based on his seasonal work (April – October) at Arches in 1956 and 1957. The back cover blurb is from a long-ago New York Times review:



“This book may well seem like a ride on a bucking bronco. It is rough, tough, combative. The author is a rebel and an eloquent loner. His is a passionately felt, deeply poetic book. It has philosophy. It has humor. It has its share of nerve-tingling adventures...set down in a lean, racing prose, in a close-knit style of power and beauty.”
—EDWIN WAY TEALE
The New York Times Book Review

I found the book interesting on several levels. For one, we had just visited the park and I was familiar with much of the landscape Abbey covered, including the nearby town of Moab, UT. It's always interesting to read about a place you've visited, or lived in.

Two, he was hypercritical of any development in the park, which in the 1950s was a national monument, an administrative level below NP status, and had no paved roads. Unless you hiked in, or perhaps entered by bicycle or mule, he didn't want you to come and spoil the place.

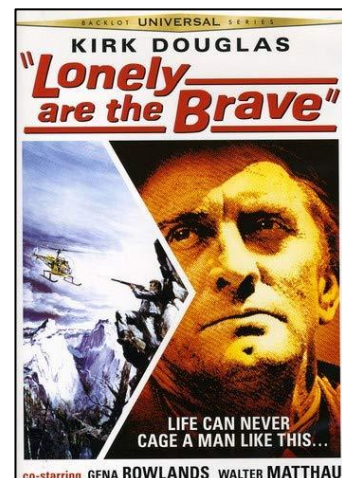
Three, his writing style was *different*, with language that could appeal to both the beer-guzzling high school dropout (who reads) and the wine-drinking college professor. In *Desert Solitaire* (and other works I later read) Abbey shows a disregard for many of the common "rules of writing." Interspersed with straightforward prose one finds plenty of choppy sentences, non-sentences, and single-sentence paragraphs. There is dialogue without quotation marks or speech tags. And he occasionally mixes first-person and third-person point of view in the same paragraph.

Like other famous writers who eschew the rules – E.L. Doctorow, Amor Towles, and Cormac McCarthy come to mind because they have all written novels without quotation marks – Abbey gets away with it because he knew the craft. His style is not out of ignorance, but purposeful. He had a master's degree in philosophy and taught creative writing at the university level.

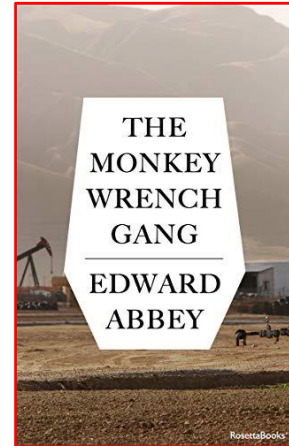
Almost two generations after his death, Abbey continues to be widely read, with *Desert Solitaire* now relegated to "classic" status in the pantheon of environmental writing. *Solitaire* was actually his fourth published book and first work of nonfiction. He would write many more non-fiction books about the Southwest, as well as dozens of essays. As for fiction, he wrote eight novels, the last one published posthumously.

- *Jonathan Troy* (1954)
- *The Brave Cowboy* (1956)
- *Fire on the Mountain* (1962)
- *Black Sun* (1971)
- *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975)
- *Good News* (1980)
- *The Fool's Progress* (1988)
- *Hayduke Lives!* (1990)

Kirk Douglas read *The Brave Cowboy*, liked the book so much he purchased the rights to it and ordered up a script (by Dalton Trumbo, Douglas's friend). The resulting movie, *Lonely are the Brave*, came out in 1962, starring Kirk Douglas, Gena Rowlands, and Walter Matthau. It has a score of 7.6/10 on IMDB.com.



After *Desert Solitaire* I ordered Abbey's most famous novel, the one to read first if you are new to his writing: *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. The "gang" of the title is a motley crew of three men and one woman, who go around sabotaging machinery to prevent corporate development in the wilderness. Their ultimate goal, never realized but often fantasized, is to blow up the Glen Canyon Dam on the Colorado River, which was built in the early 1960s in northern Arizona (photo).



Glen Canyon Dam's purpose was to provide electricity to large areas of the Southwest. But it also flooded Glen Canyon, converting a revered geologic wonder into a 186-mile-long lake, dubbed Lake Powell after the nineteenth-century explorer John Wesley Powell.

Never mind that the lake and surrounding area are a hugely popular tourist mecca (Glen Canyon National Recreation Area), or that the dam is considered a vital structure for providing power to the region. To Abbey – and his fictional "gang" – its construction was an unforgivable desecration of wilderness.

There is much humor in this book, but also a serious theme; one gets the impression that Abbey, given the power, would gladly set dynamite on the dam. *Gang* just whetted my appetite to read further, and I ordered several more of his books from Amazon and our local library. This selection provided a good sense of Abbey's unique writing style.



Slickrock (1971) - a picture book of the southwest wilderness, with pictures by Philip Hyde and text by Abbey

The Journey Home (1977) – A collection of his essays published up to that point

The Best of Edward Abbey (1984) – A compilation of essays and novel excerpts that Abbey put together "to present what I think is both the best and most representative of my writing – so far."

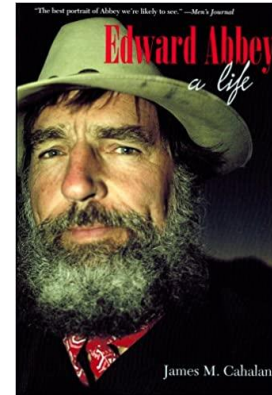
One Life at a Time, Please (1987) – Another collection of essays previously published in newspapers and magazines; includes his essay "A Writer's Credo."

The Fool's Progress (1988) – A semi-autobiographical novel, published just before his death

Hayduke Lives! (1990) – the sequel to *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, was published posthumously

To learn more about the author I read *Edward Abbey, a life*, by James Cahalan, published in 2003. Apart from his writing, Abbey's personal life carries its own fascination. He was born in Indiana, Pennsylvania, on January 29, 1927, the oldest of five children. His father was "a committed socialist,"* and held various jobs while Abbey was growing up. His mother was a school teacher and sang in the church chorus.

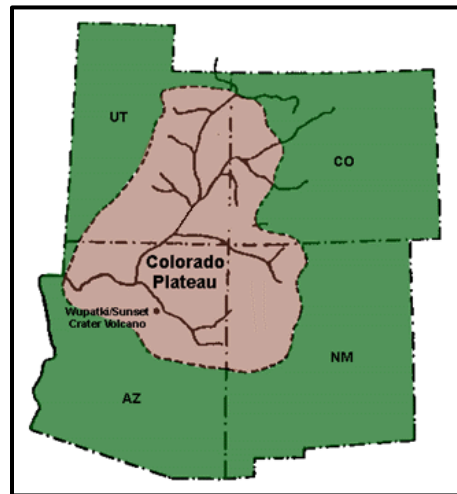
In 1944, between his junior and senior year of high school, seventeen-year-old Abbey traveled alone to the American Southwest, “by foot, bus, hitchhiking and freight train hopping.” On this trip, he fell in love with the Colorado Plateau region, a large area surrounding the juncture of Colorado, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico, of which he was to write about in later years.



After graduating high school Abbey was drafted and spent two years in the army, mostly in Italy, as a “motorcycle policeman.” He never achieved a higher rank than private. Military experience reinforced his wariness of institutions and influenced what he later described as his “anarchist beliefs.” After returning home he attended Indiana (PA) State Teachers college for two semesters, and while there he posted a letter advocating students should burn their draft card. This caught the attention of the FBI, which began a file on him that was kept for the next four decades. (In 1982 Abbey obtained his file under the Freedom of Information Act, and found it “disappointing – 130 pages of tedious dithering.”)

Abbey left Pennsylvania to attend the University of New Mexico, where he received a B.A. in philosophy and English. He followed this in 1956 with a master’s degree in philosophy.

Abbey married his first wife in 1950, and there would be four more. He was a notorious philanderer, until his last and most successful marriage in 1982, to Clarke Cartwright. He had two children with wife number two, one with wife number three, and two with wife number five. By all accounts, including his own, he was not a good father.



Abbey died in 1989, age 62, of liver cirrhosis, due to decades of alcohol abuse.

Snippets of Abbey’s Writing Style

Imagine if Abbey were alive and came to our critique group as an unknown, and then read some of his prose. He would probably give us the finger as we pointed out his multiple rule violations, then leave, vowing never to return. After he shut the door we would mutter something like, “Who does he think he is? He needs to learn how to write.”

Abbey’s rule violations? Below are two examples, both from his semi-autobiographical novel *The Fool’s Progress*. In this first paragraph, from page 28, two people are talking, the narrator (Abbey) and his wife, Elaine. There are speech tags, but no quotation marks or paragraph indents when the speaker changes.

I worked on it and got a few mouthfuls down. Best boiled sewage effluent I ever tasted, I thought, while Elaine observed my every move, each response, with hopeful eyes. Well? she asked, as I paused for reflection. Good, I said, good, mighty good, what is it? It's a sort of Japanese bouillabaisse, she said, called maru tamayaki. If I heard her correctly. Really good, I said, wondering what kind of marine life was hidden in the soup.

The next quoted passage violates the oft-quoted Point of View (POV) rule, which states that the writer should keep to one POV in a single scene so as not to confuse the reader. Moving from one POV to another is called “head hopping” and, so the rule goes, is generally to be avoided. In fact, though, authors of romance novels sometimes purposely head hop, to give readers different perspectives of a relationship. Here is a made-up example to illustrate such a POV change.

He felt the need to hold her tight, to let her know he really loved her.
She did not resist him, loving his touch and wishing for more.

Okay, that's at least clear: the man's POV, then hers. Abbey took POV change to a new dimension. In this section from page 23 of *The Fool's Progress*, “I” and “He” are *the same person*. “Elaine” is his wife, who has recently left him, and now he's all alone in the house.

V

Where am I now? (Panic.)
Black in here as a witch's womb.
He rises to hands and knees, feels along wall for light switch.
Click. No light. (Terror.) Maybe I'm dead. Dark as a tomb in here.
Try switch again. Still no light. That's right, the bulb, never did change that bulb. My God for a minute I thought I'd gone blind.
Or died. But where am I anyway? Which bulb? Last time I looked I was in the kitchen eating bread by the light of the oven, remembering Melanie, recalling Kathleen, missing Elaine.
He listens. The house seems strangely quiet. Then remembers—the Frigidaire is dead. Shot in the bowels and left for junk. He gropes forward, feels the picture-window draperies in his hands and pulls, hauling himself to his feet. The drapes come down and he falls with them, stumbling over one of Elaine's footstools, end tables, table lamps, coffee tables, piano benches, some goddamned thing. On his knees again.
Good sweet Christ, he prays.

In *My Writing Life* I provide several examples of famous writers who flaunt the basic rules of writing, rules to which the rest of us are often admonished to follow. Just how important are they? Everyone will have their own opinion, but here's my advice.

It's best to think of the rules of writing as *suggestions*. Learn them, study them, then feel free to thumb your nose at them if you think it will improve your writing.

If queried, I have no doubt established authors who follow this advice could tell you exactly what "rule" they chose to ignore. They know what they're doing. Here is what Abbey had to say about his unorthodox writing style:

I write in a deliberately provocative and outrageous manner because I like to startle people. I hope to wake up people. I have no desire to simply soothe or please. I would rather risk making people angry than putting them to sleep. And I try to write in a style that's entertaining as well as provocative. It's hard for me to stay serious for more than half a page at a time.

--Trimble, Stephen, ed. (1995). *Words from the Land: Encounters with Natural History Writing*. University of Nevada Press. p. 27.

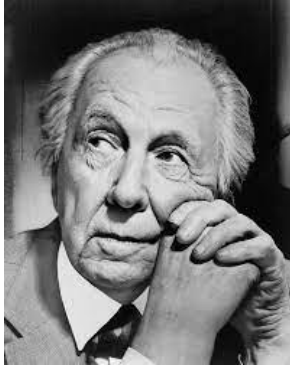
When amateurs and beginning writers break the rules, it's often out of ignorance, not purposeful. And – this is a subtle but important point – I think readers can tell the difference between intentional-breaking and out-of-ignorance breaking. So, to summarize:

If you know the rule you can ignore it at will and be creative.

Just be prepared for critiques from the rule-enforcement police.

*Unless otherwise stated, quotes are from *Edward Abbey, a life*, by James M. Cahalan

Trips During Covid: Re-visiting Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959)



As stated in Part I, ever since high school I've been a fan of Frank Lloyd Wright, "America's greatest architect." I briefly considered a career in architecture, but when it became clear I had no talent for drawing, abandoned that idea. Still, at every opportunity I would go visit one of his buildings.

While in high school in Savannah, a good friend told me of a Wright-designed home only an hour away, in Yamasee, SC. We drove up to see AuldBrass Plantation, built in 1939, my first live view of his work. No one seemed to be living there at the time (1960 or '61) and we had no trouble walking around the house.

While training in New York, Ruth and I toured the Guggenheim Museum, completed in 1959. After our move to Cleveland, we twice visited Fallingwater, Wright's most famous single-family home, located an hour out of Pittsburgh. Hard to believe it was built in the mid-1930s (see photo). On our second visit to Fallingwater, we also toured the FLW-designed Kentucky Knob house, completed 1956, seven miles away.



On a trip to Madison, WI, where one of our daughters went to college, we visited Monona Terrace, designed by Wright in 1938 but not constructed until the mid-1990s. When this same daughter went to law school in Los Angeles, we made a point, while visiting, to walk by the famed Ennis House, built in 1924.

On trips to Chicago to visit two of our kids who settled there, we toured the 1910 Robie House in Hyde Park, and FLW's own home and studio in Oak Park, a Chicago suburb (from 1893, with frequent modifications). On a trip to Phoenix one year, we visited Taliesin West, Wright's home and studio built in the mid-1930s.

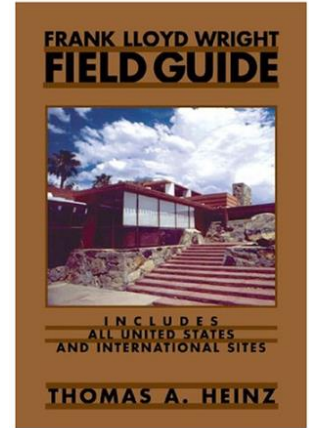
These scattered visits spanned decades, and provided only a glimpse of Wright's massive output: over 500 completed buildings during a 70-year career.

In June 2022 Ruth and I drove from The Villages to Evanston, IL, to spend the next three months in an apartment we had purchased in 2021. This put us close to two of our daughters and their families. Evanston is the home of Northwestern University, and – except for winter weather and high taxes – a great place for seniors.

We thus became snowbirds – people who spend summers up north. In addition to family get togethers, this move provided an opportunity to visit (or revisit) the greatest concentration of Frank Lloyd Wright’s work, in northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin. During those summer months, we toured: the Robie House (second time); FLW’s Oak Park home and studio (second time); Unity Temple in Oak Park; the lobby of The Rookery, in downtown Chicago; Hillside School and Taliesin East in Spring Green, WI; and the Johnson Wax Administration Building and Tower, in Racine, WI.

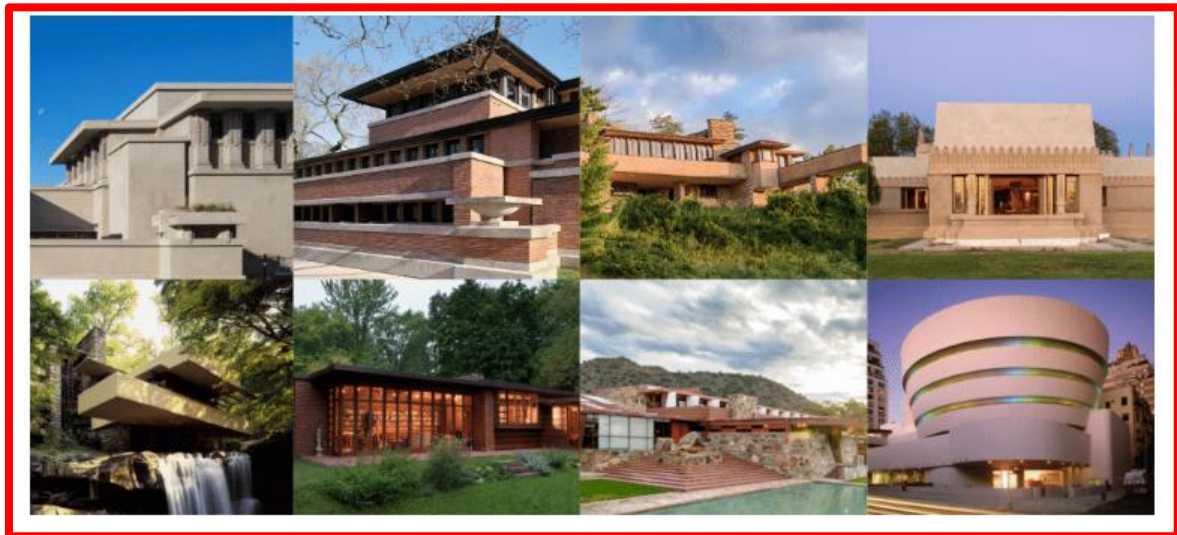
In addition, using Thomas A. Heinz’s *Frank Lloyd Wright Field Guide* that lists the location of all existing FLW structures worldwide, we drove or walked by over a dozen of his houses visible from the street, in Chicago and its suburbs.

As soon as we returned to The Villages, we signed up for a guided tour of Wright’s buildings at Florida Southern College, in Lakeland, ninety minutes from our home. Twelve buildings were constructed there over twenty years, starting in 1938, and is the largest collection of his work in a single location.



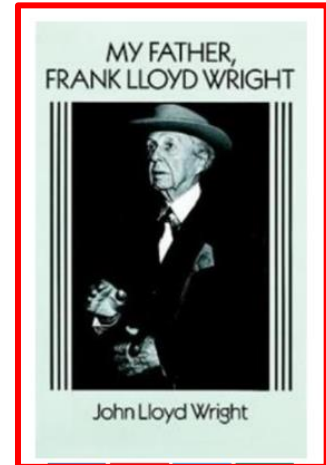
In July 2019 UNESCO designated eight Wright structures as World Heritage Sites, the same category that includes such exalted sites as the Statue of Liberty, Independence Hall, Mount Rushmore, and the Washington Monument.

The Wright UNESCO-designated structures are pictured below. L to R: Unity Temple in Oak Park, IL; the Frederick C. Robie House, Chicago; Taliesin East, Spring Green, WI; Hollyhock House, Los Angeles; Fallingwater, Mill Run, PA; the Herbert and Katherine Jacobs House, Madison, WI; Taliesin West, Scottsdale, AZ; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York City. They mark the first modern architecture designation in the United States on the World Heritage List. Ruth and I are fortunate to have toured six of these buildings.



During our Evanston sojourn I also delved in Wright biographies. It is not just his architecture that has attracted biographers, but also a long life marked by depression and triumph, one beset by scandal, legal troubles and, on August 15, 1914 that most horrific of tragedies: his mistress Mamah Cheney, her two children by a previous marriage, and four workers were murdered in Taliesin by a deranged Negro servant. Wright was not there, but in Chicago supervising construction of Midway Gardens.

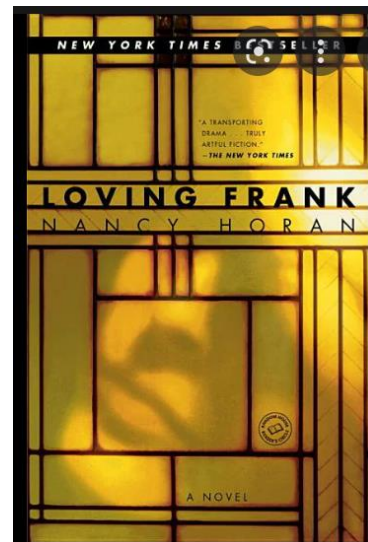
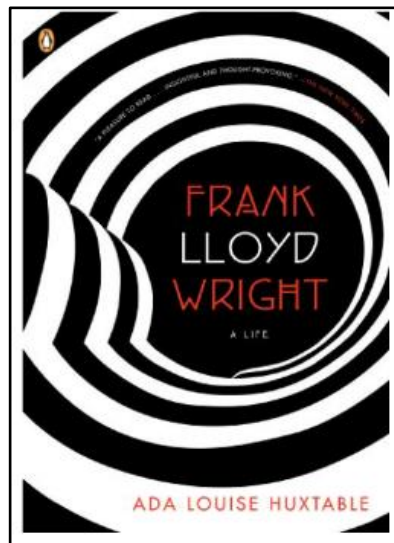
In the 1940s his son, John Lloyd Wright, also an architect, wrote a short, rambling biography, cover shown. FLW comes across as eccentric, narcissistic, and often infuriating to work for, as John did at one point. He writes:



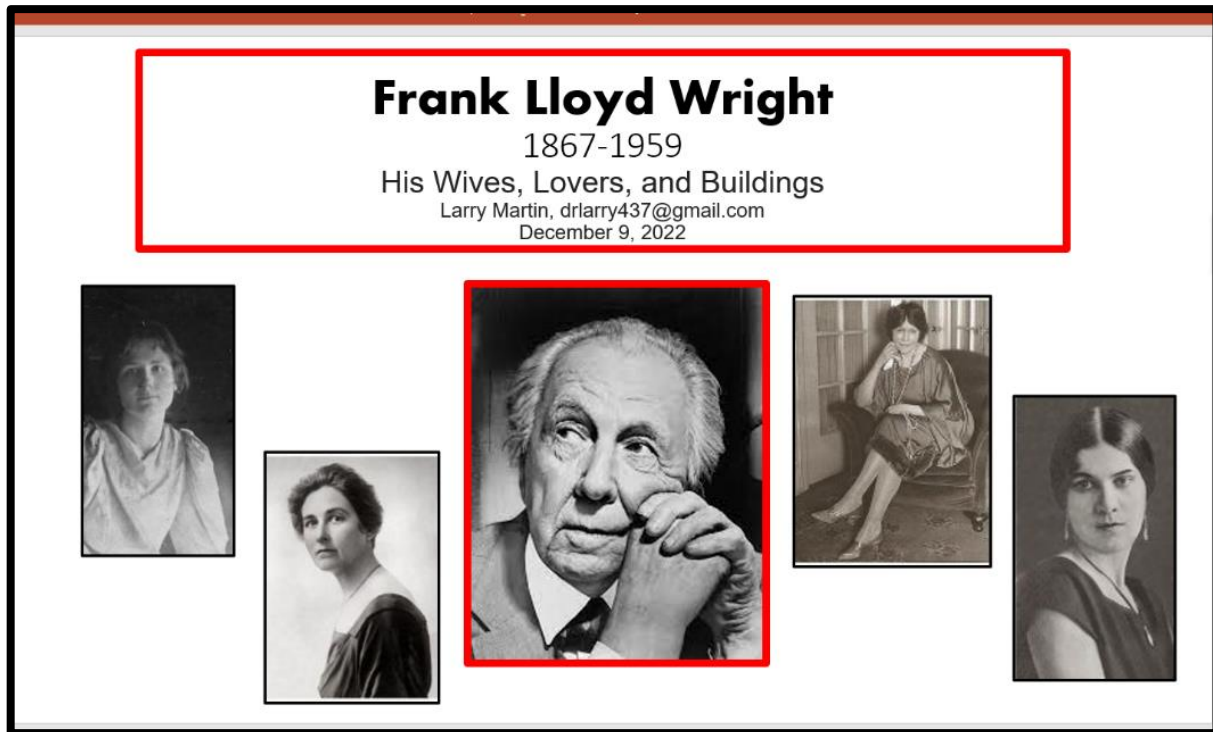
He appreciated my work, even complimented me, which was rare for him to do to any draftsman, but paying for it in the coin of the realm seemed to be handled in a department not on earth. My talks became serious; at the close of each he would assure me that “from here on” he would pay me regularly. Then he promptly forgot the whole thing.” (p. 93, *My Father, Frank Lloyd Wright*)

When John collected some money due to his father, he subtracted the amount he was due and sent the rest along. At that point, John Lloyd states, “he fired me.”

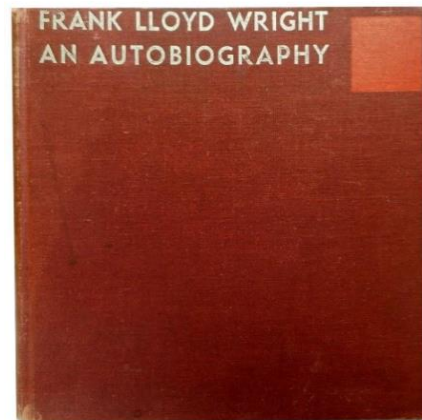
If you want to read one short biography, I recommend *Frank Lloyd Wright: A Life*, by famous architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable (1921-2013). One of the more popular books about Wright is Nancy Horan’s *Loving Frank*, a novelistic rendering of Wright’s long relationship with Mamah Cheney. First published in 2007, it was a *New York Times* best seller. Highly recommended, but first study a little of his biography, so people and places mentioned in Horan’s book will have some familiarity.



Unlike my obsession with another American genius, Irving Berlin, I have no plans to write an essay or website about Wright. Instead, I have channeled my research into a PowerPoint on his work and life, for club presentations in The Villages. Just as one does not have to be a songwriter to give an entertaining presentation on Berlin, one does not have to be an architect to do the same about FLW. Shortly after returning from Evanston, I presented my lecture to two different clubs in The Villages. In these talks I include information about his personal life, hence the provocative title.



People don't think of the "world's greatest architect" as a writer, but in fact Wright authored 20 books during his lifetime. Most were on architecture or Japanese prints, the latter because he was an avid collector and dealer in this art form. However, his most notable book, especially for this memoir about writing, is his 1932 *An Autobiography*. It has been called "a work of fiction," in that Wright deals loosely with facts of his life, including the year of his own birth, his degree of formal education, his job-seeking on moving to Chicago, and so many other aspects. It is interesting to read biographies of his life and see how the authors use historical documents to point out FLW's numerous inventions.



Wright's autobiography's real value is in revealing his feelings at certain pivotal points, such as when his mistress was murdered and he went to bury her. At times he can be quite eloquent.

In researching profiles for this memoir, one aspect kept poking my head. If you are famous, and people want to read what you have to say, you can get away with just about anything. You can ignore the rules of writing, you can make up information about your life, you can write too long or too short. You can be cryptic or prolix. An editor may or may not suggest changes, but you will likely prevail.

After *Crooked House* came out, I liked to imagine how it would have been received had the author been famous, if Madonna, Prince, Paul Newman, or some other movie idol or rock star had been sold a defective house and written about it. Okay, maybe they wouldn't write such a book, but if they did, chances are it would have found a publisher pronto, and sold widely.

If you want to write a book, it pays to be famous. Fame sells.

Postscript

In Part I, I profiled Ayn Rand, and briefly discussed her first great novel, *The Fountainhead*. Many people think Howard Roark was patterned after Frank Lloyd Wright. Rand certainly knew Wright (and later commissioned a house by him that was never built), but Roark was not Wright. A brief yet complete answer to this often-raised question is in Barbara Branden's short Ayn Rand biography.

After the publication of *The Fountainhead*, she [Rand] would be asked if Roark was patterned after Frank Lloyd Wright. He was not. She has stated: "The only resemblance between Howard Roark and Frank Lloyd Wright is in their basic architectural principles and in the fact that Wright was an innovator fighting for modern architecture against tradition. There is no similarity in their respective characters, their philosophical convictions, nor in the events of their lives." (*Who Is Ayn Rand?* Barbara Branden, Paperback Library, 1964; page 156)

Would You Go? First Journey to Mars

Starting with science fiction as a kid, I've always been fascinated by space travel (yes, both Frank Lloyd Wright *and* science fiction). That interest surfaced when I decided to write the children's picture book on gravity.

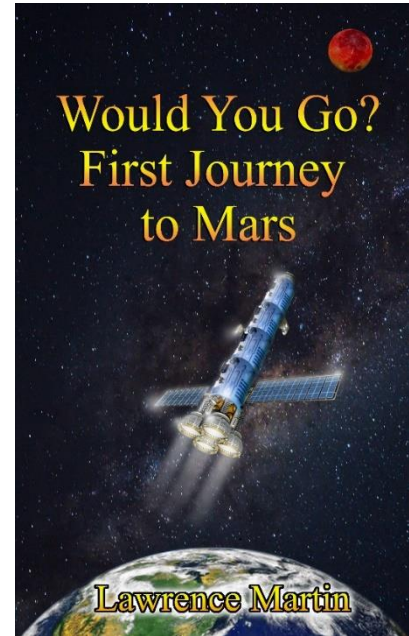
I got the idea of writing a fiction story about travel to Mars, and started the work in April 2021. That summer Ruth and I visited Kennedy Space Center at Cape Canaveral, just a two-hour drive from The Villages. Apart from the amazing exhibits – an actual space shuttle and the Saturn V rocket are on display – the history recounted there brings back lots of memories growing up -- Sputnik! Alan Shepard! Moon Landing! And of course, the two Space Shuttle explosions (Challenger 1986 Columbia 2003) that killed everyone aboard.

Although NASA and Elon Musk write often about travel to Mars, there was very little at Kennedy on the subject. There is, however, much to learn there about the potential perils of space travel.

Throughout the year I revised the book considerably, and ended it at 35,000 words. Thus, it's a novella, not a full-length novel. I tried to stick to real science into the story, mindful of the mistakes made by Mars-travel TV shows such as "Away" and "Stowaway."

I struggled a bit with how to make the novella both informative and interesting. I had to assume that many potential readers know little about space travel, or the actual risks involved. To this end I opened the story with a long NASA meeting during which the pros and cons of making the Mars trip are debated. Some fellow writers thought this was a little too drawn out, as it delayed the action of the story. Yet I also felt that without this background, much of the story wouldn't make sense. Why the hell are they going to Mars? Shouldn't we just be sending robots instead? And what if China beats us to it? All these questions are raised in that NASA meeting, which spans two chapters.

But I also saw the risk of losing readers without some early action. My solution was to take an action scene from the middle of the novella, and put it as the very first chapter. It shows the disappearance of the ship's Russian cosmonaut, with the two American astronauts looking frantically for him. Is the outside the spaceship? Alone?



I don't answer these questions in that first chapter, but trust the reader will be curious enough to go thru the NASA meeting and get to where the trouble begins. I have put this first chapter in Appendix 4. See what you think.

The novella reflects my personal skepticism about the feasibility of the human voyage as is currently planned: eight-to-nine months long. I fictionalize that NASA plans to send three married couples on this first voyage. In a NASA board meeting to plan the trip, one member argues that a Mars trip with humans should wait for faster technology, that humans cannot survive the risks of isolation, zero gravity, and cosmic radiation for so many months. When he later publishes a paper titled "The Optimum Number is Zero," referring to the number of astronauts for the trip, he is kicked off the NASA Board. The spaceship, Orion DST (Deep Space Transport), takes off for Mars in early 2035.

Of course, the NASA naysayer is prescient. The log line for the novella is: Three couples embark on NASA's first human journey to Mars, an eight-month voyage. What could go wrong?

Would You Go? First Journey to Mars was published as an e-book on Amazon Kindle in late 2022.

<https://www.amazon.com/Would-You-First-Journey-Mars-e-book/dp/B0BHZDXXP7/>

From the River to the Sea

In May 2023 I gave a talk in The Villages, to the Civil Discourse Club, on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. I presented both sides of the conflict, emphasizing that the goal of the Palestinian terrorists – including Hamas and Hezbollah – was to eliminate Israel “from the river to the sea.” Here is one of my PowerPoint slides.

Yet...what may seem irrational to us is NOT irrational to Islamic terrorists and their supporters.

| | |
|---|---|
| <p><u>Western Values</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sanctity of life; governments don't recruit people to commit suicide• Freedom of religion; no government-established religion• Separation of church and state• Democratic elections• Equality of men and women before the law; homosexuality not illegal• Freedom of speech and press• Free markets and the rule of law• Rhetoric does not call for destruction of any Arab country or killing of Arabs | <p><u>Values of Islamic Terrorists*</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Death is honorable in the name of jihad; suicide bombers recruited to attack civilians, with payments made to their families• Only one legitimate religion – Islam; adherents of any other religion are to be killed, marginalized or driven out• Religion and the state are one• Dictatorship – military or theocratic• Unequal laws for men and women; homosexuality criminalized• No freedom of speech or of the press• Corruption and power determine markets and the law• Appropriate to preach calls for destruction of Israel and killing or removing all the Jews <p style="text-align: right; color: red;">*and their supporters and enablers, who are legion</p> |
|---|---|

I also pointed out that labeling Israel “apartheid,” a common charge by the pro-Palestinian crowd, shows simple ignorance, since over twenty percent of Israeli citizens are Arabs, with full voting rights. This inclusivity is in marked contrast to Arab nations and Palestinian-controlled territories which are true apartheid, with zero Jewish citizens. Yet in the discussion period after my talk, a few people still defended the label “apartheid,” because Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank were restricted in their movements into Israel. Of course, they neglected to mention reasons for the restrictions: years of Hamas rockets and West Bank suicide bombers. It was not that these people had a different opinion of the facts – that wasn't the issue. The issue was that they chose to alter the facts, or ignore them, to arrive at their anti-Israel bias.

While most of the people voicing opinions agreed with my points, the few who misrepresented the conflict's history surprised me a bit, since they were educated retirees. It got me to thinking: What is the origin of this mis-information, this ignorance?

I came to the realization that much of this ignorance originates in our colleges, which have long preached a progressive, anti-Israel bias. Well before the October 2023 Gaza war uncovered widespread anti-Semitism demonstrations on elite college campuses, I knew that anti-Israel

movements like BDS (boycott, divestment, sanctions) were popular among many college students. I also knew – unlike many of the ignorant students – that the true, oft-stated goal of the BDS movement was simply to destroy Israel.

At that point – late May 2023 – I decided to write a novel about the BDS movement on a fictional college campus. I titled it *From the River to the Sea*. Ideas came quickly, and by mid-September I had finished a draft, commissioned a cover, and queried agents about publishing the book.

The novel gives much background about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, focusing on the BDS movement in fictional Great Lakes University, in a fictional Chicago suburb. The draft placed the story sometime in the latter half of the 2020s. I assumed that the situation between Israel and its enemies would remain about the same over the next few years: more missiles fired by Hamas with interceptions by Israel’s Iron Dome; more war-mongering by Iran; more of the routine turmoil that Israel deals with while it builds a first-world, high-tech economy.

Then came October 7, 2023. After the Hamas massacre and ensuing Gaza war, the timeline of my novel made little sense. If it’s the late 2020s, characters can’t discuss what Hamas might do since they’d already done it. At the same time, though, I realized the information provided in the story was still relevant, as it helps explain the history leading up to October 7.

Also, apart from the history presented in the novel, I thought the *story* could stand on its own: love interest among college students; a threatened terrorist attack that brings in the FBI; a young woman who starts off “kumbaya” about the conflict and comes to a rude awakening during a pro-Palestinian march; a couple of murders; and an unexpected pregnancy.

The problem I was faced with, after October 7, 2023: how do I make the novel relevant in light of the Hamas massacre and ensuing Gaza war? Over the next two months I made the following changes.

- Fixed the date of the story so it takes place in the year *before* October 2023
- Revised some dialogue of a college professor to consider the possibility of a full blown terrorist attack and how Israel’s response would unleash anti-Semitism among college students.
- Have the female protagonist travel with her boyfriend to Sderot, the Israeli town closest to the Gaza border, where she makes a cogent observation about its proximity.



- Added a Preface that contains a headline about the October 7, 2023 massacre, and also a news item from a week later about the pro-Palestinian response of college students. Following this Preface, I added three words above the Chapter 1 title.

One year earlier...

1 – Shabbat Shalom [Peaceful Sabbath]

For various reasons (my age; the nature of the subject), I did not expect any agents or publishers to be interested, and the event of October 7, 2023 made that a certainty. I did get a few responses, all similar: ‘Sorry, not for us.’ One publisher kindly wrote:

“After careful consideration, we've determined that although the subject matter and approach are engaging, the project is not a fit for our current acquisitions plans.”

Books That Died Aborning

Asimov, in his autobiography *I, Asimov*, mentions several books he started and never completed, for various reasons. I imagine this is true for many authors who write and publish multiple books. We have great ideas, and often move them forward on paper or in a digital file, but then they die. I've had several like this; they range from just an idea to an almost completed book. They each occupied hours of my time and so, in a negative sense, were part of my writing life

How to Deal with Bad People

After the house debacle 1987-1988, and the two self-published books that came out of it, I still could not get out of my mind how badly we were treated by the developer and his incompetent cronies and how the legal system worked against us. I viewed the three defendants as Bad People. Ruth is a psychiatrist and with her expertise, I thought of writing a non-fiction account of what it's like to deal with Bad People. At the time Rabbi Kushner's book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* was a best seller, but it dealt with naturally-occurring bad things (he had lost a teenage son due to a rare genetic disease). My book would be more like "when bad people hurt good people" and focus on how to avoid dealing with sociopaths and incompetents.

I wrote a couple of chapters under Ruth's name, but soon realized my heart wasn't in it. The project was just another attempt at catharsis, and if the first self-published book about the debacle (*Crooked House*) was not selling, "Bad People" wouldn't either. I just let it go.

Nightmare on Spruce Street

Okay, no nonfiction book about "bad people." What about fiction? A novel about a crooked house and crooked people? Not the faux-humor of *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House*, but *Nightmare on Spruce Street*. I actually outlined all twenty-five chapters of a novel with this title. This was well before my first published fiction book, so before I evolved into a "pantsner," someone who writes by the seat of his pants. Back then – the early 90's – I was a plotter. Here is my outline of the opening chapter.

This story is about the Millers, Ralph and Janet. Ralph is a 36-year-old accountant in a mid-sized firm. She is a registered nurse. He is doing well, is liked at the firm, and has just received a raise to \$70,000. Together they make about \$110,000. They live in a small two-bedroom bungalow in a large city of a midwestern state. They are tax-paying, law abiding, non-contentious people [us!]. They do not own a gun. They decide to extend themselves and buy a \$400,000 custom-built house. With property values appreciating by 10% yearly, they feel it is now or never. They travel to a new development where all the lots are owned by builders and sold by a local real estate company, TOPS REALTY. They fall in love with one particular lot: a $\frac{3}{4}$ acre plot of land on a cul-de-sac that slopes gently into a wooded ravine in the back. One of the more expensive lots, it is owned by a builder named Sam Murdock.

Nothing came of *Spruce Street* after the outline. It was too much nonfiction-sounding, and as I didn't put in any mayhem or plot twists, saw it would likely have no appeal. Still, I had one more book idea arising from our house debacle.

Journey to Rondeau

On July 20, 1994, I wrote the following in my journal.

I spend much of my spare time writing the scuba book [*Scuba Diving Explained*]. This week I began a new book, *Journey to Rondeau*, told in the voice of an attorney wrestling with - what else? - a civil residential construction case. I've only written a few pages, as a brief respite to the scuba book one day. This tale came to me in a vision, as the vehicle by which to convey the basic immorality of the legal profession. Tell it through the voice of an attorney! This lawyer is sailing from Cleveland to Rondeau [Canada], solo, in order to contemplate his case, and what he should do. He is defending a sleaze ball builder, and wonders if he should lie and prostitute himself to do so, or do the right thing and help the plaintiffs who have a legitimate complaint. In the background of course is a story about solo sailing to Rondeau. I plan to throw in a storm. This is all very embryonic. If the story works it will take about a year to finish. If not, I'll abandon it.

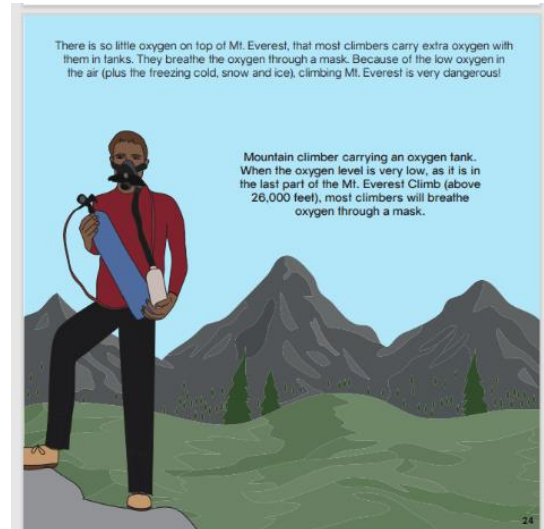
Rondeau is the closest Canadian point to Cleveland, 46 miles straight across Lake Erie, and during the years we had our 27' Catalina I made two sailing voyages there, each time with two friends. In that regard I was familiar with the intended setting: Lake Erie. The lawyer part? Looking back, my comment about the "the basic immorality of the legal profession" is clearly hyperbolic. (Two of our kids became attorneys!) The legal profession is no more immoral than the medical or any other profession. It's just that I had a negative view of the legal profession from both our house experience, also from the lung disease diagnosis scams being perpetrated by the plaintiff's bar. Anyway, the book went nowhere.

The Story of Oxygen

The background to this non-fiction book idea is detailed in a Part I. I did a ton of research, created a comprehensive web site with primary source documents, but never wrote the book.

You Always Need Oxygen

In December 2015 I published my first children's book, *Gravity is Always With You...Unless You're an Astronaut*. I was very pleased with the illustrations, and decided to do another children's picture book, this one on oxygen. I wrote out the text for *You Always Need Oxygen*; and in December 2015 sent the draft to Rebecca, who began working on the illustrations. Two of them are shown below.



We actually finished the book, except for final formatting, and I even assigned it an ISBN. So why wasn't it published? What happened was that I soon had to deal with the Gravity book screw-up (see chapter "NASA's Etymology Error"). Redoing *Gravity* took precedence in the spring of 2016, and the oxygen book stayed dormant. When I got back to it, I realized it needed formatting, a few more pictures, some text revision. All in all, I just saw no future for the book, so dropped it. I could still revive it at some point.

Sequel to *Out of Time*

I wrote *Out of Time: An alternative outcome to the Civil War* with a sequel in mind. The book ends with the South fighting off the North to a stalemate. On the last page young Jimmy Barnett has a dream that he will one day be President of the new Confederacy.

Jimmy awoke in a sweat, relieved it was all a dream and that he did not have to give a speech after all. He was happy to lie in bed, with no task but to return to sleep. The dream remained vivid for the few minutes as he tried to recall what Julia looked like, if she spoke to him or if he saw her after climbing all those stairs. The details faded away. He wondered about the nature of the dream. All previous dreams were about desires (Julia) or fears (war) or family, or had familiar scenery in them. This one was about something never before in his consciousness. He had never been to Richmond. And most certainly, he had *never* thought of one day becoming President of the Confederate States of America. Was such a thing possible?

The sequel would go from 1865 to the end of the nineteenth century and present an alternative history of the U.S., given the different way the war ended. One Amazon reviewer even expressed interest in reading a sequel. I wrote a few pages and even settled on a title: *Just in Time: The Confederacy after Armistice*.

Had a traditional publisher taken *Out of Time* and asked me for a sequel, I would have written it; I had the ideas in my head. But like most self-published books, *Out of Time* was not a

big seller, so I put aside the idea. This is just as well, since I then got the idea for *Liberty Street*, by far my best and most successful Civil War novel (won 2nd prize for historical fiction with FWA).

4 Steps to Writing a Book for Publication

By the end of 2015 I was deep into self-publishing and began to give talks on the subject. I created a website, “4 Steps to Writing a Book for Publication.” Fortunately, common sense took over. I surveyed the universe of books on self-publishing and realized my book would be lost amid a sea of authors who actually knew a lot more about the subject than I did. So, I confined my efforts to the website, plus giving lectures to writing groups in The Villages, and let it go at that. No book here. My outline for this book is included in [Appendix D](#).

House of God Redux

After reading Samuel Shem’s *The House of God*, I thought of writing a spoof lambasting medical administrators, with their penchant for rules and regulations and grade-F memo writing. My bad guy, Dr. Troy Smithers, would end up in a heroic battle with my good guy, Harry Udine (me!). Here is part of a long treatment I wrote for the novel.

Dr. Troy Smithers never met a preposition he didn’t like. He used them liberally, wantonly, because he thought more was better. He did not become Cleveland Memorial Hospital’s Chairman of Medicine for academic or clinical brilliance. He became Chairman because, though a cardiologist by training, he loved running meetings, and writing memos. The more prepositions, the better. He hurled them at his medical staff in a series of verbose and opaque memos, letters, emails. As various bureaucracies – state and federal government, the Joint Commission on Hospital Accreditation – demanded more and more documentation, Dr. Smithers became Memorial’s go to doctor. He volunteered every opportunity to supervise the underlings whose job it was to serve up all the necessary statistics: Medicare readmission rates within 30 days of discharge; average length of stay for inpatients; days in hospital before transfer to a skilled nursing unit. And if the stats didn’t meet arbitrary “criteria,” it was his job to find out why and “fix the problem.”

Early in his career Smithers chaired Utilization Review, then Credentials, then Quality Assessment. Along the way his clinical practice dwindled, by choice, since he derived far more pleasure from meetings and memos than from patient care. Finally, the day came when he became the Chairman of the Department of Medicine...

...When time came to appoint a new head of the Utilization Management Committee, Smithers chose Harry Udine. Harry, a well-respected pulmonologist and intensivist, accepted, since the time commitment was not all that great. In delight Smithers sent the staff an email:

June, 23, ----
Memo to Medical Staff
Cleveland Memorial Hospital

I am happy to report that Dr. Harry Udine has agreed to be the new Chairman of the Utilization Management Committee at Cleveland Memorial Hospital, a position that is very important to the hospital and to all of the medical staff members and patient care providers who work for Memorial Hospital. As you know, Dr. Udine is also Director of the ICU, and so he is fully knowledgeable about the ins and outs of patient care and all of its ramifications. He may ask some of you to assist him in the important issues of length of stay, hospital readmissions, and of all the other important aspects that we must deal with on a regular basis here in the hospital. To all of you who can assist us in these important missions, it is much appreciated that you are giving of your time and of your expertise in this regard, and I want to take this opportunity to thank all of you.

Troy Smithers, MD
Chairman, Department of Medicine

I relished the idea of populating the book with these preposition-laden memos from Smithers, and crafting his coming battles with Dr. Udine. I had a plot all figured out, but it never went anywhere.

Coda

It's fair to say my writing has been all over the place. I developed an interest in some subject, did research, and wrote about it. The writing was always part of the learning process.

When you've lived as long as I have, this list of "interests" can get quite long. Below is my list, in roughly chronologic order of when I chose to write about a subject. "B" indicates I wrote either a nonfiction book about the subject, or a novel in which the subject was presented based on research. "W" indicates I wrote an internet essay or blog on the subject, and/or gave a detailed PowerPoint presentation.

Because I was writing and publishing long before the internet became available, in some situations the websites came years after the book; in others, I worked on both simultaneously.

The three subjects without either B or W – sailing, hiking, and Mormon history – are included because my interest in them led to specific activities in which Ruth and I spent a lot of our leisure time, and for which I read many books and travel guides.

B-W: Pulmonary diseases for the general public

B-W: Pulmonary physiology

B-W: Arterial blood gases

B: Intensive Care patients

B-W: Scuba Diving

W: History of oxygen therapy

Sailing

B: New-home building

B-W: Golf

W: Occupational lung diseases (OLD)

W: Bias of academicians on diagnosing OLD

B: Time travel

B-W: Sleep disorders and sleep medicine

B: Las Vegas

W: Savannah vs. Charleston

B-W: Climbing Mount Everest

W: Foreign travel – Israel and Jordan

W: Civil litigation

B: The Villages, FL

W: Hyperbaric oxygen treatment

B: Music theory for the Native American flute

B: Music theory for the ukulele

B: Music theory for the piano

Day Hiking

Mormon History

B: Gravity (for kids)

W: Self-publishing
B-W: The U.S. Civil War
W: General Sherman, his life and memoirs
W: The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict
W: Irving Berlin
W: The writing craft
W: Frank Lloyd Wright
B: Travel to Mars

I sometimes fantasize my list as micro-Asimovian. Of course, Asimov wrote over 500 *traditionally-published books*. On *many more* topics. And he is a legend in the world of science fiction, one of the “big three,” along with Robert Heinlein and Arthur C. Clark.

Some might view my writing career as that of a dilettante, but I don’t think of myself that way. When I got involved in a subject, it was far more than any dilettante. I was *committed*.

Do I wish I had stuck to one or two genres all these years, and tried to develop a following, perhaps made some money writing? Not at all, since I always enjoyed writing what interested me at the moment, without regard to whether it would be commercially successful; self-publishing almost guarantees it won’t be, no matter what you write anyway. However, if any of my books had caught on, found a traditional publisher, and led to a request for more of the same, I would likely have complied, at least for another book or two. But then, I’m sure I would have come upon a new interest, and written a book (or website) about it.

So, no regrets. It’s been a good life.

Appendix A – Advice and Brief Observations

From Introduction and Part I

The good news about self-publishing is that it's easy to do.

The bad news about self-publishing is that it's easy to do.

Money spent on advertising by the author rarely pays. You will likely never sell enough books to recoup what it costs to advertise.

Don't assume a professional editor will always do a good job. Often they do not.

Having a traditional publisher is no guarantee of success. The people you work with are more important than the name of the company.

For self-published books, writing is the easier part. The harder part is in promotion and marketing.

If you are fortunate to secure an agent for your book, you must give the agent at least a year to see find a publisher. If the agent does not succeed, you've lost a year.

If you are in control and know your purpose, ignoring some common rules of writing can enliven many a paragraph.

One great advantage of having a traditional publisher is that your book has a chance to be widely distributed.

You never know where your writing will take you.

When you account for the expenses incurred, very few people make money writing and self-publishing books.

Have an idea for a book you just want to distribute to family or close associates? It can be any size, any length, on any subject – one of the advantages of “self-publishing.”

A non-fiction book that aims to instruct must be clear, informative, and along the way test the reader's understanding of the material.

If you want to be commercially successful, best to stick to one genre.

For commercial success – better than sticking to a single genre – write one blockbuster novel.

How do you write a book about a subject when you are not an expert?

Answer: Go to your computer and start typing.

If you want to learn a subject in depth, do research and write about it. A story, an article, a website, or a book.

Impartial critiques during the writing process can often point out obvious mistakes, or unclear passages, and lead to necessary revisions.

If you go with a self-publishing company, research the company before signing a contract.

If you receive a cold-call to promote your self-published book, hang up. Guaranteed. Total. Waste. Of Money.

Books that *should be published* and *could find an audience*, may still be rejected, for a variety of reasons. The author should not despair, but consider one of two options: further pursuit of agents and/or publishers (of which there are hundreds), or self-publish.

Academics who take a position in a controversial area may not be forthright with their biases or conflicts of interest. Be skeptical of “official” statements and pronouncements.

Writers write.

If you decide to write a newsletter for your organization, don’t underestimate the amount of work involved. Not just the writing, but the proofreading, the formatting, the distribution. Above all, make sure it is readable and is of interest to your intended readers. Add pictures of people if feasible.

If you know a subject in depth, you can use your knowledge to infuse a work of fiction. See profiles of Robin Cook and Harry Turtledove, two masters of knowledge-based fiction writing.

Unless you are writing fantasy or science fiction, the backdrop for your novel – the setting, clothes worn, household items, modes of transportation, dates of historic events – should be accurate. Get your facts right so readers won’t be distracted and can concentrate on the story.

Want to be a writer? Go read other stuff. Lots of other stuff. And start writing. Pour out your words. Let Frederick Douglass be an inspiration.

If you are determined to find an agent and traditional publisher, you have to be hyper-diligent. One published author, blogging on Writers Digest website, states you need to query 80 agents or more.

When you publish a book, expect negative reviews. EVERY best seller has negative reviews, including Harry Potter books and novels by Stephen King. The goal is to just get more positive than negative reviews.

Write a great story that people want to read and you can ignore the critics.

From Part II

4 Steps to Writing a Book for Publication. 1. Get an idea. 2. Write obsessively. 3. Review and edit – over and over. 4. Publish.

Some combination of printed paper and cloud backup of a computer file will best preserve anything important. Do not rely on a single digital file to back up your work.

An e-mailed club newsletter is probably not going to be read by most members, or even a majority of those to whom it is sent. If you don't enjoy doing the newsletter, then don't do it. Your lack of enthusiasm will show.

Don't expect a bestseller if you don't tell the world about your book.

No matter how brief the writing, if it's for the public always seek feedback. You often don't know what you don't know.

For historical fiction, and any other fiction that relies on information that can be fact-checked, try to get the facts straight. Wikipedia is a good place to start, but whenever possible go to the initial sources. And, if you plan to quote something, give full attribution.

Most musicians who write about music theory don't have a good grasp of what beginners don't know...so their explanations are often inadequate, poorly worded, and/or confusing.

For a potentially difficult subject like physiology or music theory, it helps to incorporate four elements in any written explanation: appreciation of what novices don't know; clear, unambiguous writing; repetition; feedback.

Certainly, for younger authors, who have more time and more gumption for rejections, the advice is sound and worth repeating. Don't give up!

Write-get feedback-revise.

Unless you have artistic skills, I strongly recommend a professionally-designed cover for self-published books.

Common mistakes are common. We all make them. Have your writing critiqued by other writers before publishing.

You should not change your words unless you agree with the change.

For beginners, learning to write is a learning curve, sometimes steep. You have to be open to criticism, and willing to rewrite, make changes, and learn about the craft.

When you self-publish you can do whatever you want, which of course can be both good and bad.

Whether or not you self-publish, always request a proof copy of your book before it goes on sale.

The keys to self-publishing: 1) Make the writing as good as you can: write-get feedback-rewrite; 2) Decide on one of three basic paths to producing the book: a) do it all yourself; b) obtain freelance help as needed for editing, proofreading, cover design, and/or formatting; c) research to find a “self-publishing company” for all tasks, one that has a good reputation and an acceptable business model.

It’s best to think of the rules of writing as *suggestions*. Learn them, study them, then feel free to thumb your nose at them if you think it will improve your writing.

If you know the rule you can ignore it at will, and be creative.

If you want to write a book, it pays to be famous. Fame sells.

Appendix B – Books Read

“If you want to be a writer, you must do two things above all others: read a lot and write a lot.” Stephen King, *On Writing*

King doesn’t specify what you should read, though he does provide a list of the “best books I’ve read over the last three or four years... These are the ones that worked for me, that’s all.”

Amen to that. Author profiles in *My Writing Life* deal with writers who, to some degree, influenced my own writing and/or thinking. The influence may have been based on their total writing career (Isaac Asimov), or on just one book (Samuel Shem), or on how they mixed a medical career with writing (Dr. Carlos Williams).

This Appendix includes books by those authors, plus many others I read for research, or simply found enjoyable and/or enlightening at some point in my writing life. Many authors in the list were (or are) prolific, and I read more than one of their books, often several. To keep the list from exploding I include only one book per author. I make no pretense to being “well-read,” so don’t be surprised that many famous/great/popular authors are not to be found (no JK Rowling, no JRR Tolkien). Life is too short.

I’ve omitted textbooks, reference books, technical syllabi, travel guides, children’s books, anthologies of multiple authors, and plays (hence, no Shakespeare). I’ve also left off numerous self-published books by Villages authors that I heard read during our critique group sessions; any list of these books would likely be incomplete and cause fellow writers to ask, “what about my book?”

The list is in alphabetical order by author. Co-authored books are listed by the first-named. An asterisk means the author is profiled in *My Writing Life*.

The Monkey Wrench Gang – *Edward Abbey
The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy – Douglas Adams
Break 100 Now! From Hacker to Golfer in Just 90 days – Mike Adams and T.J. Tomasi
Undaunted Courage – Steven Ambrose
Destiny Disrupted: A History of the World Through Islamic Eyes – Tamim Ansary
This is Cuba: An American Journalist Under Castro’s Shadow – David Ariosto
I, Asimov – *Isaac Asimov
How To Enjoy Writing – *Janet Asimov

The Fire Next Time – James Baldwin
Bach, Beethoven, and the Boys: Music History as it Ought to be Taught = David W. Barber
Irving Berlin: A Daughter’s Memoir – Mary Ellin Barrett
Best. State. Ever. – Dave Barry
Industry of Lies: Media, Academia, and the Israeli-Arab Conflict – Bed-Dror Yemini
Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil – John Berendt
Rise and Kill First – Ronen Bergman
The Joy of Music – Leonard Bernstein
As Thousands Cheer - Laurence Bergreen
Civil War Stories – Ambrose Bierce

Leisureville – Andrew D. Blechman
The Zealot and the Emancipator – H.W. Brands
They Fought Like Demons: Women Soldiers in the Civil War – Deanne Blanton and Lauren M. Cook
The Great White Lie – Walt Bogdanich
On Learning Golf – Percy Boomer
Who Is Ayn Rand? – Nathaniel Branden and Barbara Branden
Reclaiming Israel’s History – David Brog
The Da Vinci Code – Dan Brown
A Walk in the Woods – Bill Bryson
Thank You For Smoking – Christopher Buckley
Atlantic High: A Celebration – William F. Buckley
Goddess of The Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right – Jennifer Burns
Writing Fiction – Janet Burroway
Decision Points – George W. Bush

Adrift: Seventy-Six Days Lost at Sea – Steven Callahan
Edward Abbey: A Life – James M. Cahalan
In Cold Blood – Truman Capote
The Civil War – Bruce Catton
Selected Stories of Anton Chekhov – Anton Chekhov
Alexander Hamilton – Ron Chernow
And Then There Were None – *Agatha Christie
The Hunt for Red October – Tom Clancy
Rendezvous with Rama – Arthur C. Clarke
O Jerusalem – Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre
Coma – *Robin Cook
Woodrow Wilson: A Biography – John Milton Cooper, Jr.
The Silent World – J.Y. Cousteau with Frederic Duman
Sahara – Clive Cussler

The Greatest Show on Earth – Richard Dawkins
Microbe Hunters – Paul de Kruif
The Case for Israel – *Alan Dershowitz
A Tale of Two Cities – Charles Dickens
Ragtime – E.L. Doctorow
Crime and Punishment – Fyodor Dostoevsky
Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave – *Frederick Douglass
Hound of the Baskervilles – *Arthur Conan Doyle

Breaking 80: A Journey Through the 9 Fairways of Hell - Lee Eisenberg

A Good Walk Spoiled – Michael Feinstein
“Surely You’re Joking, Mr. Feynman!” – Richard Feynman
The Great Gatsby – F. Scott Fitzgerald
Madam Bovary – Gustav Flaubert
Grant and Sherman: The Friendship that Won the Civil War – Charles Bracelen Flood
American Assassin – Vince Flynn
The Civil War: A Narrative, Volume 1 and II – Shelby Foote
The Day of the Jackal – Frederick Forsyth
The Diary of Anne Frank – Anne Frank

Sherman Takes Savannah – H. Ronald Freeman
Medicine’s 10 Greatest Discoveries – Meyer Friedman, M.D. and Gerald W. Friedland, M.D.
Free to Choose – Milton & Rose Friedman
The Greatest Game Ever Played – Mark Frost
Irving Berlin: A Life in Song – Philip Furia

Married to a Bedouin – Marguerite van Geldermalsen
Andrea Dorea: Dive to an Era – Gary Gentile
The First 50 Pages – Jeff Gerke
Over the Edge: Death in Grand Canyon – Michael P. Ghiglieri, Thomas M. Myers,
Eat Pray Love – Elizabeth Gilbert
Israel-A History – Martin Gilbert
Many Masks: A Life of Frank Lloyd Wright – Brendan Gill
How Starbucks Saved My Life – Michael Gill
The New Ayn Rand Companion – Mimi Gladstein
Outliers – Malcolm Gladwell
Lord of the Flies - William Golding
Team of Rivals – Doris Kearns Goodwin
Israel: A Concise History of a Nation Reborn – Daniel Gordis
Q School Confidential: Inside Golf’s Cruellest Tournament – David Gould
The Lost City of Z – David Grann
A Time to Kill – John Grisham
The Whole Body Approach to Allergy and Sinus Health – Dr. Murray Grossan
The Kid Who Climbed Everest – Bear Grylls
You Can’t Make This Stuff Up – Lee Gutkind
Short Stories – Henri Guy de Maupassant

Irving Berlin: Songs from the Melting Pot – Charles Hamm
On the Road and off the Record with Leonard Bernstein – Charlie Harmon
The Scarlet Letter – Nathaniel Hawthorne
The Road to Serfdom – F.A. Hayek
Dune – Frank Herbert
Stranger in a Strange Land – Robert Heinlein
Ayn Rand and the World She Made – Anne C. Heller
Catch 22 – Joseph Heller
The Old Man and the Sea – Ernest Hemingway
Plagued by Fire: The Dreams and Furies of Frank Lloyd Wright – Peter Hendrickson
Short Story Collection – O. Henry
Hiroshima – John Hersey
The Old-New Land – Theodor Herzl
Skinny Dip – Carl Hiassen
God is Not Great – Christopher Hitchens
Marching with Sherman – Henry Hitchcock
Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House – Eric Hodgins
Ben Hogan’s Five Lessons: The Modern Fundamentals of Golf – Ben Hogan
The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table – *Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr.
Never Too Late: My Musical Life Story – John Holt
Loving Frank – Nancy Horan
Confederates in the Attic – Tony Horowitz
The Hunchback of Notre Dame - Victor Hugo
Brave New World – Aldous Huxley

Frank Lloyd Wright: A Life – Ada Louise Huxtable

Irving Berlin: American Troubadour – Edward Jablonski
The Golf Swing Simplified – John Jacobs
Savannah, or a Gift for Mr. Lincoln – John Jakes
Saving Savannah: The City and the Civil War – Jacqueline Jones
Dubliners – James Joyce

Elon Musk – Walter Isaacson

When Breath Becomes Air – Dr. Paul Kalanithi
Irving Berlin: New York Genius – James Kaplan
Irving Berlin: From Penniless Immigrant to America’s Songwriter – Paul M. Kaplan
Endurance – Scott Kelly
The Soul of a New Machine – Tracy Kidder
On Writing – *Stephen King
The Man Who Would Be King and Other Stories – Rudyard Kipling
Rich Dad Poor Dad – Robert Kiyosaki
Pages off the Doctor’s Pad – Harold C. Klein, M.D.
Into Thin Air – Jon Krakauer
Ultimate High: My Everest Odyssey – Goran Kropp
Shadow Divers – Robert Kurson
When Bad Things Happen to Good People – Harold S. Kushner

Bird by Bird – Anne Lamott
Devil in the White City - Erik Larson
The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo - Stieg Larsson
A Present for Mr. Lincoln – Alexander A. Lawrence
Blue Highways – William Least Heat-Moon
To Kill a Mockingbird – Harper Lee
The Big Short – Michael Lewis
Arrowsmith – Sinclair Lewis
Get Shorty – Elmore Leonard
The Call of the Wild – Jack London
The Story the Soldiers Wouldn’t Tell: Sex in the Civil War – Thomas P. Lowery, M.D.

Disturber of the Peace: The Life of H.L. Mencken – William Manchester
Sherman: A Soldier’s Passion for Order – John F. Marszalek
End of the River – Dr. Robert Martin
Catherine the Great – Robert Massie
On the Road – Cormac McCarthy
Encounters with the Archdruid – John McPhee
The Battle Cry of Freedom – James McPherson
Artists Under Fire: The BDS War Against Celebrities, Jews, and Israel – *Lisa Melman
The Ideas of Ayn Rand – Ronald Merrill
The Source – James A. Michener
Moby Dick – Herman Melville
Bringing Down the House – Ben Mezrich
The River of Doubt – Candace Millard
A Path to Peace – George Mitchell and Alon Sachar
Jerusalem-The Biography – Simon Sebag Montefiore

Blue Highways: A Journey into America – William Least Heat Moon
The White Nile – Alan Moorhead
Admiral of the Ocean Sea: A Life of Christopher Columbus – Samuel Eliot Morison
Splendid Isolation: The Jekyll Island Millionaires' Club 1888-1942 – Pamela Bauer Mueller
Cousteau: The Captain and his World – Richard Munson
Writer to Writer – Cecil Murphy
Golf in The Kingdom – Michael Murphy

Rocket Men: The Epic Story of the First Men on the Moon – Craig Nelson
The Devil's Bookkeepers, Book 1: The Noose – Mark Newhouse
The Fine Green Line: My Year of Adventure on the Pro-Golf Mini Tours – John Paul Newport
Golf My Way – Jack Nicklaus
Mutiny on the Bounty – Charles Nordhoff and James Normal Hall

From Hacker to Hero in 12 Months – Michael D. Oliff
Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East – Michael B. Oren
1984 – George Orwell
Break 100 in 21 days: A How-To Guide for the Weekend Golfer – Walter Ostroske
Hit & Hope: How the Rest of Us Play Golf – David Owen

Consider This – Chuck Palahniuk
Golf and the Spirit: Golf Lessons for the Journey – M. Scott Peck
Little Red book: Lessons and Teachings From a Lifetime in Golf – Harvey Penick
Cuba Libre! Che, Fidel, and the Improbable Revolution That Changed World History – Tony
Perrottet
Oh, Florida! – Craig Pittman
The Bogey Man: A Month on the PGA Tour – George Plimpton
The Tell-Tale Heart and Other Writings – Edgar Allen Poe
The Chosen - Chaim Potok
Mark Twain: A Life – Ron Powers
The Legend of Bagger Vance – Stephen Pressfield

Atlas Shrugged – *Ayn Rand
The Yearling – Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings
The Verdict – Barry Reed
Who's Your Caddy? – Rick Reilly
All Quiet on the Western Front – Erich Maria Remarque
The Making of the Atomic Bomb – Richard Rhodes
Winning Through Intimidation – Robert J. Ringer
Packing for Mars – Mary Roach
The Persistent Pianist – Eileen D. Robilliard
The Psychopath Test – Jon Ronson
The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict – Stewart Ross
Golf is Not a Game of Perfect – Dr. Bob Rotella
The Plot Against America –Philip Roth

Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain – *Oliver Sacks
The Catcher in the Rye – J.D. Salinger
I Sang to Survive: Memories of Rachov, Auschwitz and a New Beginning in America – Judith
Schneiderman wit Jennifer Schneiderman
The Everything Essential Music Theory Book – Marc Schonbrun

The Shortest History of Israel and Palestine – Michael Scott-Bauman
The Killer Angels – Michael Shaara
My Promised Land – Ari Shavit
BDS for Idiots – Barry Shaw
The House of God – *Samuel Shem
Memoirs of General W.T. Sherman – William Tecumseh Sherman
Berlin Diary: The Journal of a Foreign Correspondent, 1934-1941 – William Shirer
The Jungle – Upton Sinclair
Sailing Alone Around the World – Joshua Slocum
The No. 1 Ladies Detective Agency – Alexander McCall Smith
The Gulag Archipelago – Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn
Illness as Metaphor – Susan Sontag
Last Train to Paradise – Les Standiford
The Millionaire Next Door – Thomas J. Stanley and William D. Danko
The Grapes of Wrath - John Steinbeck
Dracula – Bram Stoker
Wild – Cheryl Strayed
No They Can't – John Stossel
The Elements of Style – William Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White
Manhunt: The 12-Day Chase for Lincoln's Killer – James L. Swanson

The Black Swan – Nassim Nicholas Taleb
Defiance: The Bielski Partisans – Nechama Tec
The Old Patagonian Express – Paul Theroux
Israel: A Simple Guide to the Most Misunderstood Country on Earth – *Noa Tishby
Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas – Hunter Thompson
Walden – Henry David Thoreau
How to Break 90 – T.J. Tomasi and Mike Adams
The Nine – Jeffrey Toobin
The Confederacy of Dunces – *John Kennedy Toole
Southern Storm: Sherman's March to the Sea – Noah Andre Trudeau
Too Much and Never Enough – Mary Trump
Eats, Shoots & Leaves – Lynne Truss
Presumed Innocent – Scott Turow
The Guns of the South – *Harry Turtledove
The Innocents Abroad – *Mark Twain

Golf Dreams – John Updike
Exodus – Leon Uris

20000 Leagues Under the Sea – Jules Verne
The Greatest Player Who Never Lived – Michael Veron
K2: Life and Death on the World's Most Dangerous Mountain – Ed Viesturs and David Roberts
How to Astronaut – Terry Virts
Slaughterhouse-Five – Kurt Vonnegut

General Sherman's Christmas: Savannah, 1864 – Stanley Weintraub
Sherman's March – Richard Wheeler
Rejection – John White
Night – Elie Wiesel
The Doctor Stories – *William Carlos Williams (Compiled by Robert Coles)

To the Finland Station – Edmund Wilson
The Professor and the Madman – Simon Winchester
The Bonfire of the Vanities – Thomas Wolfe
The Story of India – Michael Wood
The Story of Irving Berlin – Alexander Woollcott
The Hidden Habits of Genius – Craig Wright, Ph.D.
An Autobiography – *Frank Lloyd Wright
My Father, Frank Lloyd Wright – John Lloyd Wright

How I Went From 28 to Scratch in One Year – John Youngblood

On Writing Well – Williams Zinsser

Appendix C – Occupational Lung Disease

[Letter to Editor of AJRCCM. Sent 10/25/2004, published February 2005](#)

[4-page letter addressed to: Editor of AJRCCM, and president and president-elect of the American Thoracic Society, Dec 27, 2004](#)

[Website Post - Medical Journal Publishes Junk Science](#)

Letter to Editor of AJRCCM. Sent 10/25/2004, published February 2005
Three pages, including the tiny-print Conflict of Interest statements

Correspondence

2004 Asbestos Disease Guidelines Ignore Mass Screening Abuse

To the Editor:

I had hoped that the long-awaited ATS update on diagnosis of nonmalignant asbestos diseases (1) would be thorough and point out the diagnostic abuse of mass asbestos claims. Instead, key references are omitted and some of the statements seem slanted toward supporting these claims. This is unfortunate when one considers the growing evidence that most of these claims are medically specious.

The authors provide no reference for their assertion that the difference between I/0 and 0/1 profusion readings "is generally taken to separate films that are considered to be positive for asbestosis from those that are considered to be negative." It is well known that a B-reading of I/0 is nonspecific and nondiagnostic, as it is commonly found in middle-aged smokers and in ex-factory workers never exposed to asbestos (2-4).

The authors do not reference their assertion that "the sensitivity of the plain chest film for identifying asbestosis at a profusion level of I/0 has been estimated at or slightly below 90%. The corresponding specificity has been estimated at 93%." Is this information from plaintiff attorney-hired B-readers (PAHP)? The authors do not acknowledge the fact that most International Labour Organization readings by PAHP are overinterpreted (5-7), or that PAHP are paid more for a positive diagnosis than a negative one (8). This is crucial information, as it should invalidate all medical conclusions based on "diagnoses" generated by PAHP.

The authors provide no explanation of why ATS lowered the profusion score for diagnosing asbestosis from I/1 (in 1986) to I/0 ("presumptively diagnostic").

The disclaimer that the 2004 criteria "are intended for the diagnosis of nonmalignant asbestos-related disease in an individual in a clinical setting for the purpose of managing that person's current condition and future health" is naive at best, disingenuous at worst. Just like the 1986 article, the new ATS review will be quoted in the legal arena. Unwittingly or not, the authors have published unsupported statements that can (and will) be taken out of context and quoted in court.

There is (incredibly) no conflict of interest statement (CIS) for the authors, yet such a statement is provided in every other article in the same issue, including letters to the editor and studies where it would be hard to imagine any conflict. Furthermore, the web site regarding manuscript submissions indicates that the CIS is an ironclad requirement. Is the ATS itself exempt? Considering the partisanship of asbestos litigation, each author's experience consulting for plaintiff versus the defense sides should have been spelled out in detail.

I have had the opportunity to examine hundreds of these mass asbestos claims on behalf of defendants, and am dismayed at the lack of scientific or medical merit for most of them. Solid legal and medical discourse is beginning to acknowledge this abuse of diagnosis (6-11). Now, sadly, ATS has squandered a golden opportunity to publish an above-suspicion review and champion science and objectivity in the diagnosis of nonmalignant asbestos disease.

Conflict of Interest Statement: L.M. has examined mass asbestos claims on behalf of the Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation and defending companies.

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Diagnosis and Initial Management of Nonmalignant Diseases Related to Asbestos

To the Editor:

A recent official statement of the American Thoracic Society (1) contains statements that are not supported by the literature:

1. "The clinical evaluation...should consider subjective symptoms as well as objective findings..." (p. 695). "The diagnosis of asbestosis is ideally based on an accurate exposure history, obtained whenever possible directly from the patient..." (p. 695).
2. "Plaques are indicators of increased risk for the future development of asbestosis..." (p. 707).
3. "These obstructive findings may be due to asbestos-induced small airway disease. Thus, mixed restrictive and obstructive abnormalities do not rule out asbestosis or necessarily imply that asbestos has not caused an obstructive functional impairment..." (p. 701). "In general, the magnitude of the asbestos effect on airway function is relatively small. This effect, by itself, is unlikely to result in functional impairment or the usual symptoms and signs of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. However, if superimposed on another disease process, the additional loss of [lung] function due to the asbestos effect might contribute significantly to increased functional impairment, especially in persons with low lung function" (p. 708). "Tobacco smoking is the predominant cause of airway obstruction in asbestos-exposed workers who smoke..." (p. 710).
4. "A chest film...showing characteristic signs of asbestosis in the presence of a compatible history of exposure is adequate for diagnosis of the disease: further imaging procedures are not required" (p. 696). "The positive predictive value of the minimally abnormal chest film alone in making the diagnosis of asbestosis may fall below 30% when expo-

sure to asbestos has been infrequent and exceed 50% when it has been prevalent" (p. 710).

Many of the statements are conflicting or inaccurate. Patient histories and subjective symptoms are unreliable, particularly in legal proceedings (2). Pleural plaques are evidence of exposure and do not indicate a greatly increased risk for asbestos-related disease in those workers with equal exposure and no radiologically visible plaques (3). The implication that asbestos contributes to clinically significant COPD is not supportable (4). The role of the International Labour Organization (ILO) B-reader chest X-ray interpretation has recently come into question (5, 6).

Conflict of Interest Statement: D.D.S. has no financial relationship with any asbestos manufacturer or commercial entity but has been an expert witness for the defense in asbestos litigation.

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From the Committee:

The Committee appreciates the opportunity to respond to these two additional letters. This is also an opportune time to clarify other issues that may be lost in the detail of the Statement.

Dr. Martin's letter is entitled "2004 Asbestos disease guidelines ignore mass screening abuse," as if the Statement condoned abusive practices. In fact, the Statement favorably cites both a 2002 white paper from the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health and a 2000 resolution by the Association of Occupational and Environmental Clinics regarding characteristics of responsible and ethical screening programs.

Dr. Martin makes two substantive allegations of error by the Committee in his original letter. One involves the interpretation of I/O readings, which the Statement describes, correctly, as "presumptively diagnostic but not unequivocal"; this interpretation is inherent in the International Labour Organization (ILO) Classification system. Dr. Martin also requests a reference for the statement that the plain chest film has a sensitivity of no more than 90% and a specificity of about 93% (the source says 90 to 95%); the reference is number 150, cited in the Statement on page 710.

To Dr. Smith, the Committee responds that the passages he describes as contradictory simply make reasonable distinctions. With respect to occupational and medical histories, the Committee has made the unexceptional recommendation that a physician take a history to help guide the diagnosis. With respect to his comment on pleural plaques, the Committee stands by what was written and the evidence cited. With respect to the contribution of asbestos exposure to airway obstruction, the Statement says

that asbestos exposure might be clinically significant in the presence of low lung function. Dr. Smith writes: "The role of ILO B-Reader chest X-ray interpretation has recently come into question." In point of fact, the B-Reader Program belongs to NIOSH. It is not an activity of the ILO.

Although relatively few communications have been received to date, it is unreasonable to expect the members of the Committee to provide individual responses to every future correspondent. In the interest of anticipating the concerns of others, therefore, the Committee offers the following broad overview of the Statement.

The key difference between the 1986 criteria and the 2004 criteria is that the 2004 Guidelines present a more explicit approach to diagnosis based on criteria: the need to establish evidence for exposure, to identify a disorder compatible with asbestos as a cause, exclusion of other causes, and a forceful requirement for assessing impairment in the event that the physician makes a diagnosis of nonmalignant asbestos-related disease. Although these elements were mentioned in 1986, they were not given the same emphasis.

The 2004 document also broadens the discussion beyond asbestosis, which predominated in 1986, and brings the criteria up to date with respect to modern methods of imaging, such as HRCT and digital radiography, and clinical evaluation. It also provides guidance to the physician on the initial management of the patient once a disease of this type is diagnosed, including what to look for and how to follow up such patients. The disease has to come first, so the identification of a disorder that is compatible with asbestos exposure is first. Then, the connection to asbestos exposure must be made and other plausible causes ruled out.

The emphasis in the guidelines is on structural change, not functional change, in making the diagnosis. Functional deficit is not a diagnosis, in the sense of a specific disease entity, and members of the committee thought that functional changes were secondary phenomena, too nonspecific to fulfill a criterion but which may support the diagnosis. A restrictive defect, for example, is consistent with asbestosis (and much else) but may not be present early on and is not required for the diagnosis. The asbestos-related disease entity may of course result in impairment, which should then be measured to guide care and track progression.

The document is not a major break with the past. The evidence required to meet each criterion has broadened with the advance of technology but remains conservative in that the emphasis is on the likelihood of a connection to asbestos and excluding other types of conditions, rather than identifying disease at the very earliest possible moment. The criteria are generally more specific than they are sensitive.

The Committee prepared these guidelines for the purpose of guiding physicians to the recognition and confirmation of nonmalignant asbestos-related disease for the purpose of treatment and patient care; that was our mandate. The Committee did not formulate the guidelines for other applications and is not encouraging the use of these guidelines outside of clinical diagnosis.

The Committee welcomes the comments of ATS members on the Asbestos Statement. An open forum has been scheduled during the ATS annual International Conference in San Diego for 7:00 to 9:00 pm, Sunday, 22 May 2005.

Conflict of Interest Statement: Neither T.L.G. nor any member of his immediate family or, to his knowledge, extended family have a financial relationship with any commercial entity that has a substantial interest in asbestos, exposure to asbestos liability, or business that would be affected by the Statement of this committee. During the period of deliberation of the Committee, he declined to participate in personally remunerative activities directly related to asbestos, in order to avoid the perception of conflict of interest. During this period, the George Washington University Medical Faculty Associates received fees for his professional

services in a few cases in which exposure to asbestos could have been an issue, including a small number of individual cases and cases referred by the U.S. Department of Energy for evaluation (value, less than \$7,000). Dr. Guidotti receives a small revenue from royalties derived from books, one of which, *Science on the Witness Stand* (2001), contains an appendix discussing asbestos; future sales of this book are not expected to be affected (value in 2004, less than \$200). C.A.B. has never served as an expert for a commercial sponsor in the course of his occupational medical practice; he has served as an expert witness for individuals with asbestos-related disease involved in workers' compensation and litigation represented by various attorneys and legal firms and has no contractual financial relationship with these individuals or their legal representatives with all work performed on an hourly fee for service basis; D.C. does not have a financial interest with a commercial entity that has a substantial interest in the subject of the deliberations of the Committee or the manuscript published as the Statement of the Committee. No member of his family has a financial relationship with such a commercial entity. The following represents disclosure of asbestos-related income for the years 2001 to the present: in 2001 he received \$2,750 in consulting fees from asbestos plaintiff attorneys and approximately \$4,000 from insurers, Medicare, Medicaid, work compensation and commercial insurers for evaluating asbestos-exposed individuals in his clinical practice; in 2002 he received \$4,600 in consulting fees from plaintiff attorneys and \$4,000 from third party payers for evaluating asbestos-exposed individuals in his clinical practice; in 2003 he received \$2,000 in consulting fees from asbestos plaintiff attorneys and approximately \$3,000 from third party payers for evaluating asbestos-exposed individuals in his clinical practice; in 2004, he received \$1,225 in consulting fees from plaintiff attorneys and approximately \$2,000 from third party payers for evaluating asbestos-exposed individuals in his clinical practice; M.R.H. presented at the White House and the U.S. Congress on aspects of the Hyde-Aschcroft Asbestos reform bill; his airfare and hotel were paid for by Public Citizen and he received no other compensation. He wrote a position statement for the Association of Occupational and Environmental Clinics which set ethical guidelines for physician participation in asbestosis screening. In the early 1990s, he participated in an asbestosis screening program which was associated with investigations from multiple government agencies. No impropriety or wrongdoing was found. G.H. does not have a financial relationship with a commercial entity that has an interest in the subject of this letter; J.R.B. does not have a financial relationship with a commercial entity that has an interest in the subject of this letter. He has been an expert witness for plaintiffs who have filed asbestos-related disease claims, but has not personally received remuneration for work on these cases. Remuneration has always gone to his employer, e.g., Regents of the University of California; P.H. and his employer, University of California, Los Angeles, have received approximately \$10,000 from Conwed Corp. for a project and payment for medical consultation and expert witness services and approximately \$7,500 from multiple insurers and attorneys in 2001-2004; F.H.Y.C. is employed full time jointly by the University of Calgary where he is a Professor of Pathology & Laboratory Medicine and by Calgary Laboratory Services where he is the Chief of the Autopsy Service for the Calgary Health Authority. He has not been employed by a commercial entity that has an interest in the subject of the statement and does not perform consultant work. In the past three years, his medical/legal consultations involving claimants in the United States have been entirely in the area of black lung compensation and none of the cases have involved asbestosis. He is also employed infrequently (once or twice a year) to review potential cases of occupational lung disease for the Alberta Workers' Compensation Board; in the last three years two of these cases have involved the pathologic diagnosis of asbestosis at autopsy. He is paid for these opinions at the rate of Can \$200 per hour and has also been paid to give lectures by commercial sponsors; in the last three years the only sponsorship has been by the 3M Company to give a talk on the pathology of asthma at the European Respiratory Symposium in 2002; asbestos was not part of the presentation or discussion. With Dr. Sam Schurch he has a patent pending on a treatment of asthma involving surfactants and perfluorocarbons and this has no relationship to asbestos or asbestos-related injuries. He also receives royalties from a textbook co-edited by Dr. Andrew Churg entitled "The Pathology of Occupational Lung Disease" published by Williams & Wilkins. This book covers numerous areas of occupational lung disease pathology including asbestosis. However, the chapters on non-neoplastic and neoplastic lung disease associated with asbestos exposure are entirely authored by Dr. Churg and thus the opinions expressed in this book regarding asbestos are largely those of Dr. Churg. He has no stock ownership or options in any company that would be related to the subject of this letter; W.N.R. has a contract with Con Edison to perform CT scans on employees, some of

whom have had asbestos exposure; G.R.W. does not have a financial relationship with any commercial entity that has an interest in the subject of this letter; A.M. has reviewed medical/scientific aspects of proposed administrative guidelines or legislation for asbestos-related claims for the American Bar Association in 2002 receiving no fee, for the Province of British Columbia Workers' Compensation Board for a fee of Can \$150 and for law firms for a standard per-hour fee. He lectured for the Defense Research Institute for their standard honorarium and for a symposium on law and medicine for a Federal District Court, receiving no fee. He is a designated "impartial expert" for the New York State Workers' Compensation Board, receiving their standard fee. He served on a NIOSH expert panel on the B Reader Program in 2004, receiving no fee. He has reviewed clinical cases for plaintiff and defense law firms and served as an expert witness in three mesothelioma trials in the past three years, the last being 10/2/02. All his publications on asbestos-related disease have been supported solely by the academic medical centers at which he was employed.

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ON BEHALF OF THE AD HOC COMMITTEE TO
UPDATE THE 1986 ATS CRITERIA FOR THE
DIAGNOSIS OF NONMALIGNANT ASBESTOS-
RELATED DISEASE

4-page letter addressed to: Editor of AJRCCM, and president and president-elect of the American Thoracic Society, December 27, 2004

<http://www.lakesidepress.com/Asbestos/ATS-openletter.htm>

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December 27, 2004

Dr. Edward Abraham
Editor, American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine

Dr. Sharon Rounds
President, American Thoracic Society

Dr. Peter Wagner
President-elect, American Thoracic Society

Re: Official Statement of the American Thoracic Society. Diagnosis and Initial Management of Nonmalignant Diseases Related to Asbestos. Amer Jour Res Crit Care Med 2004;170:691-715.

Dear Drs. Abraham, Rounds, and Wagner:

I had hoped that the long-awaited ATS update on diagnosis of nonmalignant asbestos disease (1) would be thorough and discuss the diagnostic abuse of mass asbestos claims (2). Instead, in regards to diagnostic aspects that impact the claim process, the article contains numerous inaccurate, unsupported and un-referenced statements (3-4). Their origin appears to be underlying bias by several authors and some ATS officials over issues such as banning the product, plaintiff compensation, and subjectivity in diagnosis (5). Compounding the problem is that AJRCCM broke its own ironclad policy by omitting author Conflict of Interest statements (3).

All of this is particularly troublesome because what ATS publishes is often quoted in asbestos legal proceedings. It is therefore vital that the 2004 ATS Asbestos Statement be perceived as objective, scientific, beyond reproach. Unfortunately, inaccurate and un-referenced statements, coupled with lack of author disclosure, undermine the article's credibility and that of ATS as well.

To help restore ATS/AJRCCM credibility in this area, I recommend going outside the established coterie of asbestos experts for an unbiased assessment. Convene a blue-ribbon, independent panel of clinician-researchers, people *not* professionally involved with asbestos. Ask them to review the ATS Official Statement and all criticisms (mine as well as others). Their report should address these questions:

Questions for an Independent Panel

- 1) Is there evidence of professional bias that subverted the ATS Statement's objectivity and scientific analysis?
- 2) Does it contain statements that are not documented or referenced, but that should have been in a 26-page, 160-reference review article?
- 3) Does it omit explanation of why the threshold profusion score for diagnosing asbestosis was changed from 1/1 [1986] to 1/0 [2004]? If so, should an explanation have been provided?
- 4) Can the article be construed to favor the non-scientific asbestos diagnosis screening process run by plaintiff attorneys and their hired B-readers?
- 5) Did the 11-author committee lack balance across the spectrum of opinion regarding asbestos diagnosis and causation of disease?
- 6) Should there have been full disclosure about possible conflicts of interest for the authors? (For example, any: letters written to Congress to influence asbestos legislation? editorials regarding compensation for asbestos claimants? money received from the plaintiff's bar for speaking and consulting? memberships in attorney-sponsored asbestos groups?)

If the panel is truly objective and independent, you will find many affirmative answers. ATS/AJRCCM officials should publish a meaningful response to each issue raised, with full transparency, and self-criticism where appropriate. At this point, publishing a few letters to the editor and superficial conflict of interest statements won't suffice to restore credibility.

* * *

Ironically, I did not set out to investigate ATS biases or broadcast my criticisms on the internet. In October I wrote a brief letter-to-the-editor about the article (6), which was quickly rejected. You (Dr. Abraham) implied I might receive a response from some of the Committee members, but that never came. Only then did I begin working on the web sites and exploring the authors' asbestos-issue pronouncements. Using publicly-available documents, I discovered striking biases that explain the article's pro-plaintiff, 'anti-science agenda' in the area of asbestos disease diagnosis (5).

AJRCCM is of course not alone in mistaking bias for science. NEJM, JAMA and other journals have dealt with this problem over the years (7-16). Most commentary regarding author/editorial bias deals with drug research, but bias can infect almost any subject, *especially* criteria for asbestos disease diagnosis. It is for this reason – the potential for bias in any area – that AJRCCM's "Instructions for Contributors" states:

“At the time of submitting an original scientific manuscript, review article, editorial, or letter to the editor to the Journal, each and every author is required to complete a "Disclosure of Financial Interest" form.” (17)

On this disclosure form, which every author must sign, is clearly stated the importance of protecting against bias in fact *and* spirit:

“A conflict exists not only when judgment has been clearly influenced. It also exists when judgment might be influenced or might be perceived to be influenced. That is, a conflict exists before any actual breach of trust, and irrespective of whether a breach of trust actually occurs.” (18)

I can think of no rational reason why ATS-sponsored authors should be exempt from this unequivocal policy. Early this year former AJRCCM editor Dr. Martin Tobin wrote about 10 measures of journal performance, and used AJRCCM to illustrate them. His no. 8 is particularly germane here:

“An *eighth* measure of performance is steps taken by the editor to ensure the integrity of the literature. Because clinicians and researchers rely heavily on biomedical publications, they have a vested interest in their integrity. There is broad agreement that integrity of a journal rests jointly on the ethical behavior of authors and editors—an aspect of science that should not be confused with the honest errors inevitable in vigorous research. An editor’s greatest responsibility is to ensure that every item published in his or her journal satisfies the highest standards of scientific integrity. How an editor is perceived to handle this responsibility has far-reaching effects on the trust of readers in a journal. And without trust, there is no worthwhile journalism.” (19)

To any who doubt the importance of issues raised in this letter, I strongly recommend the rest of Dr. Tobin’s “eighth measure” comments (available on-line). It is not too late for ATS/AJRCCM to admit there’s a problem and act to restore credibility. The central issue can be summed up in two words – science and objectivity. Both have been trampled by bias in the 2004 Official Statement. Please help restore science and objectivity in asbestos disease diagnosis.

Yours truly,

Lawrence Martin, M.D.

cc: Other ATS physicians and scientists

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Website Post - Medical Journal Publishes Junk Science

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Medical Journal Publishes 'Junk Science' Asbestos Article

Refuses to print rebuttal

[Lawrence Martin, M.D., FCCP](#)

[Return to Dr. Martin's asbestos index](#)
[Return to Dr. Martin's global index](#)

[Chest](#), the official medical journal of the [American College of Physicians \(ACCP\)](#), frequently publishes articles dealing with asbestos lung disease. In February 2004 an article appeared which does not measure up to Chest's scientific standards. The title of the article is [Changing patterns in asbestos-induced lung disease](#).

The authors of this article falsely concluded that there is a rising incidence of asbestos lung disease in the U.S. Because their methods and assumptions were in error, their conclusions were as well, so much so that the article fits the category [junk science](#). One characteristic of junk science is that 'garbage' or invalid data are selectively used to arrive at pre-conceived results. The invalid data in this article consisted of thousands of 'positive' chest x-ray reports of asbestos disease -- reports that were solicited and paid for by asbestos plaintiff attorneys, who stand to benefit monetarily from each positive report.

The process of using attorney-sponsored chest x-ray reports to generate bogus asbestos diagnoses has been discredited in both legal and medical publications. Yet the authors of the Chest article accepted every one of these thousands of x-ray reports at face value. The x-rays were not read by 'blinded' physicians, i.e., physicians ignorant of the asbestos claims, but only by doctors paid by the attorneys for their positive reports. Hardly a scientific or objective methodology. (For more information on the role of physicians in generating these bogus diagnoses, see [Runaway Asbestos Litigation -- Why it's a Medical Problem](#)).

I wrote a letter rebutting the article and pointing out these flaws. I cited numerous medical references that, in the aggregate, proved the authors' conclusions invalid ([six of these references had previously appeared in Chest](#)). Chest's editor-in-chief, Dr. A. J. Block, rejected my letter, stating "The ACCP and Chest do not wish to enter into any more asbestos controversy. Sorry." In response, I wrote to Dr. Block about the rejection, and sent a copy to officials of ACCP, plus the lead author of the article in question.

By refusing to publish a legitimate rebuttal to this poorly conceived and designed article, one that has medical-legal implications, Chest and ACCP appear to be in bed with asbestos plaintiff attorneys. Chest's actions -- first in publishing this article without any editorial comment, then in refusing to publish a rebuttal letter -- are certainly most unusual for a peer-reviewed medical journal beholden to scientific principles.

On this web site I lay out all the materials and make some recommendations. People interested in the subject can come to their own conclusions.

Appendix D – Short Stories, Website Posts, and a Novella Chapter

[Short Story: Crusade](#)

[Short Story: A Grand Illusion](#)

[Short Story: A Fatal Assumption](#)

[Blog Post: Pour Out Your Words. Then Revise, Rewrite.](#)

[Website Post: Four Steps to Writing a Book for Publication](#)

[Website Post: My Restaurant Rant](#)

[Chapter 1 from *Would You Go? First Journey to Mars*](#)

Crusade - a Short Story

Dr. Lewis Miller always struggled to get his smoking patients to quit. He cajoled, he pontificated, he pointed out facts. When all that failed, he used his funeral home gambit.

“Mable,” he would say to his patient, when her smoking habit came up, “What funeral home do you do business with?”

This question would, of course, get Mabel’s attention. After her ‘why-the-heck-are-you-asking-me-that?’ response, he would go into his the-cigarettes-are-killing-you-quick spiel. He tried some variation of this question with most of his addicted patients.

Sometimes it worked, but most often not. Still, he kept trying.

And if one of his smokers was admitted to the hospital, for whatever reason, he would, in the middle of examining the patient, ask where they stashed the cigarettes.

“My cigarettes?”

“Yes, the ones you brought with you.”

Outed, the patient would invariably reveal the hiding place, usually a purse or the bedside drawer.

“May I have them, please?” the doctor would ask, ever so politely. “You won’t be smoking in the hospital.” And usually, without a fuss, the patient would turn them over. Like his other methods, though, this gambit seldom worked to break their habit. Still, he felt it a duty to always try something, and he liked inventing new ways.

Which brings us to the case of Amanda Wiggins, a middle-aged woman with chronic lung disease whose chief complaint was always some variation of “I am short-winded.” She had gone through several hospitalizations for chronic lung disease, yet continued to smoke *even when in the hospital*, this being an era when “smoking rooms” were available for tobacco-addicted patients.

Neither fear of funeral homes, emergency rooms, artificial breathing machines, lung cancer, nor skin wrinkles—all warnings offered by Dr. Miller—had made any dent in Ms. Wiggins’ smoking addiction. She was incorrigible. She continued to smoke in her hospital room, even though that was forbidden, and when reminded of the ban, she got out of bed and walked to the ward’s one small area that allowed the stinking habit.

Now you might think there is something wrong with the mind of a patient who continues to abuse the very thing making her sick, and you would be correct. There was a history of depression and a chaotic home life, and she had seen a psychiatrist on occasion, though she was no longer taking prescribed anti-depressant medication. As for Dr. Miller, he practiced pulmonology and did not feel daunted by her psychological problems. He would find a way.

He had come to learn that Ms. Wiggins’ anchor in life was the Bible and fundamentalist religion, facts heretofore not mined in his no-smoking crusade. And so, on her second day of yet another hospitalization for chronic lung disease, Dr. Miller made his move. Ms. Wiggins was in bed, reading her Bible. He arranged for her nurse, Emily, to come join him. He needed a witness in case Ms. Wiggins really did quit smoking, someone to testify to his no-smoking creativity. While he stood to the left of the bed, he had Emily stand on the other side, making it easy to observe her reaction as he focused on their patient.

“I want to discuss something with you,” he said to Ms. Wiggins.
She put down the book. “Yes?”
“It’s about your smoking, Amanda. We can’t get you better if you continue to smoke.”
There was a short pause, then she said, “I’ll quit,” in a manner which conveyed just the opposite intention.
“You’ve got to quit.”
“I’ll quit. I want to get better.”
“You’re gonna die!”
“Don’t say that, Dr. Miller. If I quit will I get better?”
“How are you going to quit? You’ve promised me a hundred times, and you always go back to smoking.”
“Well, I’ll quit now.”
“Can I have your cigarettes?” He knew her supply was endless; taking them would be like trying to cut off the flow of cocaine with a single arrest. Still, he figured it would be a step in the right direction.
“Take ’em, Dr. Miller,” she said, confidently, pointing to her nightstand. “They’re in here.”
He opened the drawer and took out two unopened packs of Camel cigarettes.
“Can I have the others?” he asked.
“I don’t have any more. That’s all I have.”
He knew there would be others, easy to obtain.
“Now you’ve got to swear you’ll quit smoking.”
“I’ll swear,” she said, showing no emotion.
He raised his brow slightly to catch Emily’s eyes, then returned his gaze to Ms. Wiggins.
“Then swear,” he repeated, raising his voice slightly.
“I swear.” Still no emotion from his patient. Dr. Miller reached over and picked up her Bible from the bed.
“Swear on this,” he commanded.
“Why do I have to swear on the Bible?” Now her voice was rising. “I *said* I wouldn’t smoke. Don’t you believe me?”
Dr. Miller knew the power of religion, especially her fundamentalist brand. Unless he could get her to swear on the Bible she would never take her promise seriously.
“Ms. Wiggins you’ve got to swear on the Bible. Otherwise God won’t believe you’re sincere.”
She hesitated and her body began to shake. She looked at Dr. Miller, then at Emily, then at her Bible. She seemed lost in thought. Then, after a few seconds, she looked up again at the doctor.
“Dr. Miller,” she said, this time with indignation, her voice trembling a little, “that’s the word of the Lord! You want me to swear on the Bible?”
“Swear!” He paused, counted the seconds: one-two-three. “SWEAR!”
“I can’t do that!”
“Then you don’t intend to quit. You lied to me.” He looked again at Emily, wondering if she found his method unprofessional, but she remained an impassive observer.
“But I will quit, Dr. Miller. I promise!”
“Then SWEAR ON THE BIBLE!”

Slowly, with hesitation, she placed her right hand on the holy book. Now he felt the flush of victory for his crusade. He had reached the pinnacle of no-smoking creativity: a unique message tailored to a unique patient.

“Repeat after me,” he said. “I, Amanda Wiggins...”

She hesitated and looked again at Emily, who merely nodded her head, affirming Dr. Miller’s command. Then Ms. Wiggins looked back at him, and their eyes met. Evangelist and true believer. She repeated his preamble.

“I, Amanda Wiggins...”

“Do swear before God in Heaven...”

“Do swear before God in Heaven...”

“That I will never touch or smoke cigarettes again.”

“Oh, Dr. Miller!”

He repeated the command with raised voice, this time a deep baritone. “THAT I WILL NEVER TOUCH OR SMOKE CIGARETTES AGAIN. SWEAR, AMANDA!”

“That I will never touch or smoke cigarettes again,” she echoed.

“SO HELP ME GOD!” he bellowed, hoping no one from the hallway would hear him, enter the room and break the spell he was so carefully crafting.

“So help me God,” she whispered. With the last word her whole body shook, and she began crying. He checked her pulse and listened to her lungs. No acute problem. She was not having an asthma attack, just a religious experience.

“She’s okay,” he told Emily. “I think we can go now. She’ll be fine, but please check on her in a half hour or so.” The two professionals left the room, with Ms. Wiggins sobbing quietly in her bed.

Feeling quite smug about his effort, Dr. Miller went to see other patients. He thought: to get a patient to quit smoking you must learn to communicate on their level, to search out that part of their psyche that will obey the doctor. Why aren’t all physicians this creative with their advice?

A half hour later Emily called him to return to the ward. “Check out the smoking room,” she said. “You won’t believe this.” The tone in her voice was like a sharp needle to his inflated balloon. He ran up to the ward.

There, in a chair next to a card table, sat Ms. Wiggins, smoking a cigarette. He noticed only two items on the table, an ashtray and a pack of opened cigarettes. He saw no Bible. Relaxed and calm, she looked up at her physician with not the least hint of anxiety.

“What happened?” he asked, feigning a hurt incredulity. “You PROMISED me you would quit. You promised GOD! You swore on the Bible!”

“I just had to have a cigarette,” she said, flashing an innocent smile. “And besides, I had my fingers crossed.”

Never again did Dr. Miller try religion to break a patient’s habit.

Pour Out Your Words. Then Revise, Rewrite.

This essay won Bronze medal in the category “blog posts” in the 2020 RPLA Awards. It is posted online at <https://medium.com/@drlarry437/pour-out-your-words-then-revise-rewrite-aeebcf584618>

If you’re a writer you’ve no doubt come across the topic, offered in a blog, panel, or lecture, of how to start a new novel. Advice typically boils down to two broad choices: write by the seat of your pants and revise as you go along, vs. lay a foundation by making an outline, storyboard, and/or a description of your main characters — and only then start writing your book. In essence, it’s “wing it” vs. build some structure *before* writing the opening sentence.

Of course neither method is right or wrong, and I could spend the rest of this blog post quoting famous authors about there being no rules in writing. Still, there are people, typically writing newbies, who do want advice from more experienced writers. To them I say:

Pour out your words. Then revise, rewrite.

That’s my advice, and it comes down to the following steps.

1. Get the idea in your head of what your novel is about. You need some idea of the setting, the period, the main character or characters – but only in your mind.
2. Start writing what is in your mind. Let it all come out. In the beginning, best to ignore spelling, grammar, punctuation, syntax. If you make an obvious typo you can change it on the fly, but otherwise, just keep writing. Plenty of time for revision later.
3. While you’re writing, the story will evolve in your mind, and tell you where to go. When you have a nice chunk written, say one or two chapters, stop and reread what you wrote. This is where you begin to make revisions and rewrite.
4. You don’t have to start at the beginning. Maybe it’s just the last chapter in your head or a killer middle chapter. Or, perhaps you have the greatest sentence with which to end your masterpiece. No matter. Create the last page and put it in.
5. Seek feedback, ideally from fellow writers in a critique group (in person or online – doesn’t matter). You don’t know what you don’t know, or what you’ve missed, until someone else reads it. You’ll be amazed at stupid mistakes not caught by your own eyes. In my own writing, about half the suggestions people offer in critique groups result in changes. And not a small number lead me to exclaim: “I wrote that? Oh god, how dumb!”
6. Don’t be in a hurry. Keep writing, revising, seeking feedback. Except for a few rare geniuses, good writing is an iterative process. Multiple revisions, rewriting, more revisions, more rewriting. Hemingway said he wrote the last page of *A Farewell to Arms* “thirty-nine times before I was satisfied.”

Now, you may be asking: “What about research? I’m writing historical fiction.” Research is important and should be ongoing *while writing*. If you have a story idea in your head, start writing first. When I wrote my first historical fiction centered on Civil War Savannah, I had the story in my head, but was not sure of the period details. Only by writing out the scenes in draft form did I even know which details would be important for the novel. Then I did extensive research, all the while writing more chapters. Research without clear questions in your mind may be interesting but is apt to be aimless for your novel. Start writing, learn what questions you have, and do the research as you go along.

What about non-fiction? People who write non-fiction already know a fair amount about their subject, or wouldn’t be writing a book about it. Here, too, start writing about what you know, and do research as you go along. If for some reason, you want to write a non-fiction work about a subject you know nothing about – perhaps as a way to learn something totally new – you have my permission to do some research first.

Whether fiction or non-fiction, eventually you’ll come to the end. Put your work aside for a period, at least a few weeks. Then go back and review it. Revise as necessary. Don’t be in a hurry.

Why is my approach better than first building a foundation, which might include a detailed outline and/or a description of the main characters? One reason is that the time spent crafting the foundation could be better spent writing the actual story. Yes, it might be nice to check the character descriptions you prepared before starting the novel, to see that you envisioned Jeremy as a middle-aged man, about 5’10”, with slick black hair, thin mustache and gnarly-looking eyelids. But why not just work it into the story from the get-go?

I entered the room and that’s the first time I saw Jeremy, a middle-aged guy, couple of inches shorter than six feet. I found his slick black hair a turn-off – I do not like men who grease their hair. His other features – a thin mustache and gnarly-looking eyelids—made him singularly unattractive. *I have to work with this guy?*

You can always change the description, of course. But you don’t have to go back to some character list to do it. It’s better to unfold your character descriptions in the novel, and not do double work. For me, laying out a foundation before starting a work of fiction is just a needless distraction. Writers write, and you should be able to just sit down and pour out your words on paper or computer screen.

Okay, this advice is for newbies mainly, and highly personal. Don’t bug me with how your Pulitzer Prize-winning novel started with a detailed outline. Do what you want. But if you have an idea for a full-length book, my strong advice is still the headline of this blog. Get it all out, whatever is in your head. After revision and rewriting some part of the work, to a modicum of satisfaction, get feedback. Keep writing, revising, rewriting.

Why are you still reading this? Go pour out your words!

Four Steps to Writing a Book for Publication

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First posted December 3, 2015
Updated March 14, 2023

1. Get an idea

- Everyone has ideas. Ideas are free, plentiful.
- Your family history is a book idea. Lots of people write memoirs.
- One author’s advice to would-be novelists: “If you could read [the gossip columns] of the New York Post or The New York Daily News every day for a week and not come up with a dozen ideas for a novel, you might consider findings a new hobby.”
(http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/18/books/warren-murphy-writer-and-creator-of-remo-williams-dies-at-82.html?_r=0)
- See my fictional reviews: <http://www.lakesidepress.com/fictitious-reviews/intro.html>. The “reviewed works” don’t really exist. They’re just my ideas of what might make a good book, play or movie.

2. Write obsessively

- No one best way to write a novel. Detailed outline of plot/characters ahead of time vs. free style.
- Web sites on ‘How to Write a Novel’
(<http://www.advancedfictionwriting.com/articles/snowflake-method/>).
- There are two broad approaches to writing a novel: “plotter” (first create an outline, list of main characters and their features) and “pantsers” (write by the seat of your pants). Don’t know right or wrong. My personal recommendation is that once you have an idea, just pour out your words, then revise, rewrite, revise, rewrite. I advocate this in a blog post, <https://medium.com/@drlarry437/pour-out-your-words-then-revise-rewrite-aeebcf584618>; this article is also in Appendix D.
- Learn rules of the craft as you go along, or after the first draft (and then once learned, you can break them). (See list of references.) *But get something down.*
- “She cant see the stars because of the brite mune” is better than *nothing*.

3. Review and edit – over and over

- No matter how many times you review your work, you will miss things.
- Enlist friends to read for you.
- Beta readers abound; sign up for Goodreads.com beta-reading group
- Join a critique club (see chapters in this book on critique clubs)
- The number two problem with self-published books is poor editing. (The number one problem is poor writing.) If feasible opt for professional editing.
- As a minimum, pay for professional proofreading.

4. Publish

- Unlikely to find agent or royalty publisher; most authors today self-publish
- Many great and/or successful authors initially self-published after being turned down (John Grisham, Agatha Christie, Dr. Seuss and, yes, J.K. Rowling. See
- Unfortunately, since it's so easy to do, there's a lot of self-published junk. (The following paragraph is from <http://www.cnet.com/news/self-publishing-a-book-25-things-you-need-to-know/>):

Good self-published books are few and far between.

Again, because the barrier to entry is so low, the majority of self-published books are pretty bad. If I had to put a number on it, I'd say less than 5 percent are decent and less than 1 percent are really good. A tiny fraction become monster success stories, but every few months, you'll hear about someone hitting it big (for those who don't know already the "Fifty Shades of Grey" trilogy was initially self-published).

- Self-published books are typically 'print-on-demand' – nothing printed until someone wants a copy.
- Many books are published only as e-books
- There are many services to help you self-publish. In addition to editing and proofreading, it is vitally important that a self-published print book is formatted to look no different from a traditionally-published book; this means proper page numbering, paragraphing, headers and/or footers. If you don't have this formatting skill, pay to have the book formatted.
- Be wary. Many, if not most, "publishing" companies are nothing more than marketers for expensive author services, with zero interest in helping you sell your book. *They make money by selling to the author, not to the public.*
- If just beginning, I recommend you go with go with KDP, Amazon's self-publishing platform https://kdp.amazon.com/en_US/. It's the most widely used among self-published authors.

A Grand Illusion

First published in Florida Writers Association's Collection Series for 2020.

Entering the Las Vegas Pinnacle Hotel, Bonnie could not avoid the large electronic signs advertising that night's main event: "The Grand Illusionist, 9 pm, Starlight Theater." Her husband's picture loomed large in the advertisement, with his trademark cape and magician's hat.

Son of a bitch. Fourteen years with him and I'm only now wising up.

She took the elevator to their 22nd floor suite, and used her room card to enter.

What will I find now? Another honey?

Howard looked up from the couch, where he had been reading a newspaper. "Bonnie, what brings you back so soon? Thought you weren't returning until later?"

"After my gym workout, I decided to skip the movie. I have a headache and want to lie down. Is the bed free?"

"What kind of question is that?"

"What kind of husband would sleep with his mistress while his wife is working out at the gym?"

"We've gone over this. I was wrong, and I admitted it."

"You admitted it once because I caught you. How about all the other times?"

"She is not my mistress."

"No, just your stage assistant. Easily available. And you, the so-called Grand Illusionist. When I walked in on you last week, why didn't you make her disappear, like you do on the stage?"

"Bonnie, give me a break. My show starts in just two hours. Let's not argue now, please?"

"They pay you fifty grand a night here at the Pinnacle. Not bad for two hours."

"Why the hell are you bringing that up?"

"Where's the money?"

"I don't understand your question."

"Let's see, a four-week stint in Vegas twice a year, six shows a week, that's three hundred thousand times eight, or two point four million, if my math is correct. Not to mention your other shows in New York and Atlantic City. Where's all the money?"

"What the hell are you talking about? Does your credit card bounce when you go shopping?"

"No, but the money is nowhere to be found. It's not in our joint account."

"I've told you before, my agent handles it. It's in his account, under my name."

"Is your agent in the Cayman Islands?"

"What?"

"You heard me. Georgetown, Grand Cayman. I know all about it. If we get divorced, which you know damn well is coming, there won't be any estate to split. It's hidden. Off shore. And worse, dear, when the money is ultimately found, the IRS will get it all, for past taxes. And your ass will be in jail."

"I've paid all my taxes. Where do you come up with these crazy accusations?"

“Sorry, Howard, won’t wash. You have lived up to your billing. The Grand Illusionist, indeed. You’ve made the money disappear. But if your wife can’t get her share in court, I’m sure the IRS will. Your tricks might fool the Starlight Theater crowd, but not me. At least not the ones in real life.”

“This is utter nonsense. You have no evidence.”

“Oh, yes I do. I’m not always in the gym, or out shopping. I’ve been investigating. Or paying someone who knows how to find information.”

“Like what?”

“Like, what about Melissa Jane Singleton?”

Oh, his pained expression! He’s guilty as hell. Gotcha!

“Sorry, Howard. I didn’t hear your answer. Well, let me answer for you. A few months ago, you paid her a cool fifty thousand to keep quiet about your affair. She threatened to ruin your show. All documented.”

“That’s a lie!”

“Deny what you will. It’ll all come out in court.”

“It’s not fair to bring all this up just now. Be fair, Bonnie, and stop with these crazy accusations. I have a show to do tonight.”

He doesn’t want to go on stage feeling my anger. That’s good.

“You probably can do the show in your sleep, so no need to worry. I need some fresh air. If you want to discuss this further, get up off the couch. I’ll be out on the balcony.”

She opened the sliding doors and entered the suite’s narrow balcony. The sun had set, making the nighttime view spectacular, with brightly-lit casinos up and down Las Vegas Boulevard. She found the cool air refreshing. She leaned against the four-foot high wall of the balcony to get the best view and called out, “It’s a great view tonight, Howard. I can see all the way to downtown Vegas.”

He came out to the balcony, stood a few feet to her right and stared into the night. “Bonnie, I don’t want you to be angry with me. Let me get through my show tonight and we can discuss all this later. I promise I can explain everything.”

The man lies, then lies some more.

“I’m worried, Howard. After all, you are The Grand Illusionist. You can make anything disappear. Maybe even including me.”

“What the hell are you talking about? Now you’re getting really crazy. I would never harm you.”

“Okay, maybe I’m being a bit unfair. But you can see why I get so upset. A man who cheats on his wife can do anything.”

“I said I’m sorry. Can’t we let it go?”

“All right, fair enough. For now. Please hold me. It’s a little chilly.”

He walked over and put his arms around her. “So, can we be friends again? Maybe lovers tonight, after the show?”

He has barely touched me in bed the last two weeks. What a phony!

“Yes, that would be good. I’ll be in bed, waiting for you.”

He relaxed his grip and kissed her on the lips. She returned the kiss.

Now he’s happy. Off guard.

She let go of an object from one hand. “I dropped the barrette from my hair. Let me get it.”

She bent down to the balcony floor to find the barrette. Near the floor she inserted her head and shoulders between his thighs and the balcony wall, grabbed his ankles with both hands and lifted him with surprising ease, angling him toward the wall.

Not as heavy as I thought.

“What are you doing?” he cried as she stood, raising his body higher and higher. His arms flailed in the air but could not reach her. She angled his legs up so his torso now extended over the wall – and let go.

Well, Mr. Illusionist, you had one too many illusions: that you could get away with your deceits. My gym time was well spent. Amazing what 125 pounds can do with someone 50 pounds heavier.

She quickly re-entered the suite, closed the door to the balcony and walked toward the desk phone.

Now to call the front desk, report his suicide. There is no note, but he had plenty of reasons to leap over the balcony. A divorce he did not want. Soon-to-be-discovered tax fraud. Probably other mistresses seeking to extort. Justice at last!

She reached for the receiver, ready to press the button and tell her story. Just then, in the dim light, her eye caught a slight movement from across the room. *No!*

“Did you have fun out there, Bonnie?” The voice was unmistakable. And he was still sitting on the couch.

END

A Fatal Assumption

Berlin, January 1, 1933

At noon Karl Landmann, age forty-five, entered Gottlieb's Café, a neighborhood eatery on Friedrichstrasse. Inside he found his friend Levi Wolff, sitting at a corner table. Levi, thirty-six, rose as Karl approached. They hugged and took their seats.

"So, Karl, you wanted to meet me here. Business, I assume?"

"Yes, and Happy New Year to you. Gottlieb's I knew was open, has good food, and is quiet so we can talk. I trust Miriam doesn't mind you leaving home for an hour this holiday."

"To meet her dearest cousin Karl? Of course not. Now if your name was Caroline..."

Karl smiled. "I know. You would have hell to pay." He did not wait for a rejoinder, instead turned to look over the small dining area, then back to face Levi.

"Levi, see that old man over at the counter? That's Chaim Gottlieb. He owns the place. Opened it just after the Great War, in 1920."

"So you asked me here on New Year's Day to give a café tour?"

"Tell me, Levi, how is your family?"

"Family's good. Our oldest, Gretchen, is in grade school, and Matthew is learning to use the toilet. And Miriam, God bless her, is holding down the house – keeping everyone happy and healthy. And by you?"

"Cannot complain. Ruth is fine. Both kids in secondary school, doing well. And business is good. My coat factory is up to ten employees. Everybody needs a coat in our miserable winters."

"So now we come to business. Karl's Coats is still only coats? I remember you once talked of expansion."

"Yes, yes, eventually to all men's clothing. That's my plan. Next, I want to manufacture... pants!"

"Ah, so, my Wolff Pants Factory, that's why I'm called to this squalid café. I could have guessed."

"It's not squalid. And the meal's on me. Levi, you remember we joked about this once, over a year ago. You said, 'one day you'll buy me out, and I'll retire rich.'"

"Yes, I remember, Karl. Not sure about the rich, though. So, you're making an offer?"

"Yes, I am prepared. Are you listening?"

The waiter appeared with menus, but Karl motioned they weren't necessary. "Just bring one large plate of sauerbraten, a pitcher of beer, and some pumpernickel. One check, please." The waiter nodded, then walked away.

Levi picked up the conversation. "So, back to business. You are interested in my factory? But how can you make an offer? You haven't been to my place in over a year. Do you know we're now up to five workers?"

"I know. I have spies."

"I should have known."

"But, Levi, only five? Just last week my source counted six, plus yourself. Did you let someone go?"

"Then your spies don't have the latest information. And by the way, is one of them named Mandelbaum? He's always complaining, that one."

“Not Mandelbaum. Not anyone in your employ. It’s a trade secret. So tell me, who left you?”

“One of my workers, a single man, only twenty-four. He immigrated to America just last week.”

“America? He has family there?”

“Only a distant cousin. His family is here in Berlin. His parents, and two older sisters, both married.”

“So why the move?”

“A better life, he thinks. I don’t know. He told me he is fearful of Herr Hitler’s rise to power. It now appears Hindenburg is going to appoint Hitler Chancellor of Germany.”

“I know. And this scares the young man?”

“He said he went to one of the local Nazi political rallies, out of curiosity.”

“A Jew at a Nazi rally? They let him in?”

“He wore the Nazi armband, he said, just to get a view. And he doesn’t look all that Jewish.”

“So, what happened that sends him to America?”

“He said he left the rally shaking. Everything was damn Jew this, damn Jew that. All damning. That’s when he decided.”

“Well, he will meet a lot of fellow Germans in America. As for here, yes there is anti-Semitism, as there is throughout Europe. Always has been. But even with this awful depression the past three years, the clothing business seems to be thriving. Ironically, the Nazi showing in last year’s elections has boosted morale, and now my business is growing. Yours also, I know. We are German citizens, for God sakes. And I am a war veteran. Tell me Levi, when was the last time someone called you a damn Jew?”

“Let me think...in grade school. And I punched him in the face. That taught him a lesson.”

“For me, it was in university. A young radical, who turned out to have a mental condition of some sort. As I recall, he ended up getting expelled. So there is anti-Semitism, but it’s mostly the fringe. It’s not government policy. So, Levi, do you have interest in selling me Wolff Pants?”

“Did I hear a price?”

“Ten thousand Reichsmarks.”

“For everything, the building, machines, and inventory?”

“Yes, it’s a fair price. The building is worth about five thousand, the inventory and machines about three thousand, and then another two thousand will be profit for you. And I will keep you on as my assistant manager, at a fair salary.”

“Karl, if we weren’t connected by marriage, I’d be suspicious you were trying to rob me. But if you did that, Ruth would never sleep with you again.”

“So, that’s your insurance. Ruth thinks my offer is fair, generous in fact. And for the record, she will never give up sleeping with me.”

“So your offer is up front, no credit?”

“Up front, no credit. I have access to the funds.”

“Then I will admit, the amount seems fair, but what guarantee for my workers?”

“Your workers?”

“I can’t sell out if I know you’re going to let some of them go. You need them to make the pants, of course, but there must be job security for everyone.”

“Of course. I will guarantee all of their jobs for a full year. One never knows how business will go, so that seems reasonable.”

“How business will go? You mean when Hitler becomes Chancellor?”

“I just want to make sure we get out of this economic depression, which seems likely. People always need coats, but if I expand there is of course some risk. A year guarantee for your workers is fair.”

“Your offer intrigues me, Karl. Let me discuss with Miriam and a couple of my employees. Get their sentiments. I don’t want to make a hasty decision. Say I get back to you in two days?”

“Fair enough, Levi. So, what do you think about Hitler and his fellow Nazis? Should we be worried?”

“We should always be concerned, Karl. But not to the point of picking up and moving. We have families, businesses. We are no longer young and single.

“I agree, Levi. Given the Jews’ contributions to the German economy, and the politicians need for strong businesses, I don’t think we have much to fear. And don't forget, all the great German Jewish scientists, like Einstein. The Nazis are not Jew-friendly, for sure. But their leader isn’t stupid. I don’t think Hitler will do anything to hurt the Jews, for that would hurt Germany.”

-- END --

My Restaurant Rant: It's Not Just the Food.

By Larry Martin
drlarry437@gmail.com

In evaluating restaurants for in-person dining, which of the following features would you rank *the most important*?

- 1) Food
- 2) Service
- 3) Ambience
- 4) Price and overall value

When the question is asked this way, the answer is invariably “Food.” However, consider the question framed another way. In evaluating restaurants where you have dined, which of the above features has left you disappointed the most often?

My answer – and, I suspect, the answer by most people – is *not* the food. It's a toss-up between service and ambience, followed by price and overall value.

Food. Okay, food is important. That's why you go out to eat. But food is seldom, if ever, the main reason for a bad restaurant experience. A meal that's too hot, too cold, or not cooked the way you wanted can, usually, be rectified by the kitchen. It's rare to trash a restaurant because the food was horrible. Not so with ambience and service.

Ambience is the whole character of the place, how comfortable it is (the seats), its cleanliness, the background noise level. Customers don't inspect the kitchen, but if the dining area is dirty or grungy, you can bet things aren't so great in the kitchen either.

Noise is a much more common issue. Was there loud banging music that prevented normal conversation? Were your tables so close that you could hear your neighbor's chatter? Were you stuck under the wall-mounted TV blaring some news or weather channel? That's all bad ambience, and it has sullied many a meal. If you are out with friends, what's the point if you can't talk to them in a normal voice?

I appreciate that some of the younger generation might prefer loud music when they're out eating. If that's the clientele sought by the restaurant, no problem. But what about restaurants whose patrons are mainly adults, seniors, retirees? And the problem might not only be loud music. We went with some friends to try out a new indoor food court, ten or so food stations built around table seating. Five minutes in, the din was so loud we walked out. Poor design, no thought about ambient noise, yet the place was built in a retirement community. The food might have been great, but we'll never know.

Ambience is not just about inside noise. Outside dining is no fun if the restaurant's patio overlooks a busy street or parking lot. It seems ninety percent of outside dining areas overlook a busy street or parking lot. Want some car exhaust with your entrée?

Other aspects of bad ambience include hard seats that hurt after half an hour, bad ventilation (too hot, too cold), and tables near doors. Could be the front door, so every time it opens you feel a draft, or the kitchen door, which swings open every two minutes or so. Sometimes, in a crowded restaurant, you can't change your table. When that happens – and it does – should you just leave or suffer through the meal?

You can have good ambience in a low-cost eatery and bad ambience in a Michelin-starred restaurant. I would much prefer a fast-food joint where you can eat in peace and quiet, to an upscale restaurant where background noise sounds like a train station. Of course, no foodie would ever agree, but that's the point of my rant: great food will not cover for bad ambience.

Service. Too many times my wife and I have been disappointed because the service was bad or, occasionally, non-existent. Once we were with two other couples in a local, upscale restaurant. It was a busy night and after an hour – an hour! – the waitress said they would soon start working on our order. We all got up and walked out.

Okay, that's extreme. Much more common is simply lousy service, a problem that pre- and post-dates the Covid years, when staffing was a widely-understood problem. An hour to cook a steak? Another half hour to get the bill? Three times to ask that your water glass be filled? How about the ketchup that never came, or the bread basket that was never replenished? And who do you blame? The waitstaff? The kitchen? The incompetent manager? You never know – perhaps some combination of bad management and under-trained staff. We have left a restaurant because of bad ambience or bad service, but never because the food wasn't edible.

Disappointing service and bad ambience are not the rule, of course. Most restaurants that stay in business are reasonably well run. But service and ambience are the deal breakers, the things more likely to ruin your meal than the food quality.

Here's another way to look at food vs. ambience vs. service. When dining out, my disappointment *about the food* has ranged from about 75 to 100 percent of what I hoped for. Usually closer to 100%, but sometimes not as good as I expected.

By contrast, the variation in ambience has ranged from zero to 100 percent. Zero is when we walk in and out in less than five minutes. You can often tell zero right away, because the music from the loudspeaker assaults your ears at the front door. But sometimes you get seated in a quiet area, order your meal, and *then* the loudest band you never heard of, sets up shop next to your table. Bye, bye. In that case, we inform the wait staff we are in a hurry, and that we'll take the food home. The bill is the same, but by leaving we avoid an unhappy meal.

Service variability also ranges from zero to 100%. Zero is when your food never comes. Fifty percent is when it arrives way over a reasonable time limit. One hundred percent is when everything seems on time and the wait staff is on the ball.

Finally, price and value. For a first-time visit to a restaurant, from reputation or perhaps its website, you probably know if it's cheap, moderate or expensive. You can also look at a menu before sitting down, to see the prices, and then choose to leave or stay. Finally, once you do order, you will know the cost. So, while price is obviously important, it is also the one aspect least likely to vary from expectation.

But was the price worth it? Were the food and the service and the ambience worth what the bill came to? Was it good value? *Would you happily return?*

Restaurant Reviews

In my admittedly biased view, most professional restaurant reviews omit the important information. And I'm not referring to puff pieces found in city and county glossies, written to satisfy advertisers; in those reviews every restaurant is always *great*. I mean reviews by culinary critics, people who know food – as in *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, food magazines, and perhaps your local newspaper.

Professional reviewers are paid to write about food, not ambience or service. And so they want to show how gourmet-smart they are.

The vichyssoise was a bit watery, with the potato *au gratin* a touch spicier than I would have preferred. But the roasted pork was just right, cooked in a reduction sauce that harks back to the days of Napa-Sauvignon...after the meal, we cleansed our palates with demi-glasse sherbert.

Okay, I'm making fun of fancy-restaurant reviews, but in truth they are often vocabulary-challenging, and almost always omit mention of ambience and service – features that are far more likely to give a bad experience than the food quality.

Would the reviewer go back, spend his or her own money to eat there? Were the food and the service and the ambience worth what the bill came to? Was it good value? Professional reviewers seldom opine, as if they are afraid of being blacklisted. They only tell you that the vichyssoise was a bit watery and the fusion-cooked salmon accessorized with avocado was simply sublime.

If you want helpful restaurant reviews, read them from people who don't get paid to eat out, on websites like Yelp, TripAdvisor, and Zagat. There you can often find the information you need, like these comments gleaned from a variety of regular diners:

- No loud music playing here...
- Service was prompt and courteous...
- We lingered because the seats were so comfortable...

And when things are bad, regular diners don't hold back.

- The chairs were so hard we did not order dessert...
- We sat next to the kitchen...highly annoying, due to the constant swinging door.
- Conversation was difficult due to the loud background noise...
- Service was slow...painfully slow, but we slug it out...won't return.

No matter where you live, you can find reviews by people who aren't paid to write just about the food, and will comment on bad service and ambience when they experience it. Here are the types of comment I have yet to see from any professional reviewer.

This restaurant would be great if the owner wised up and started drastically improving its service. The food is good but the service is terrible. I swear the owner is trying to drive customers away. He needs to find good staff and hold on to them.

The menu is continental, and we ordered the ribeye. With the steak we also got a banging drumbeat. The piped in music had an inaudible melody, so all you could hear was incessant banging...banging. I asked the manager to turn it off. Said she'd turn it down a bit. Didn't help. Can't recommend this place – not good ambience.

Okay, that's my rant, and I can anticipate the rebuttal.

- "Sorry, food *is* the most important item. That's why you go out to eat."
- Management frequently changes, and any restaurant can have a one-off night. You can't use one bad experience to trash a place."
- "Many diners like music with their meal."

I can also expect some *ad hominems*.

- "Larry, you have no taste. If you appreciated good food, you'd have a different outlook."
- "You're the kind of guy who probably eats microwaved cheese toast for dinner."
- "You an old curmudgeon. I bet you complain about everything."

Of course, it's all a matter of personal taste, and I certainly appreciate a one-off experience. The restaurant where we never got served? We've since been back. More a matter of convenience than anything else, but we have returned.

So, what about your own favorite places to eat out, your favorite dining experiences? Why those? Chances are, all four criteria click when you go there: ambience, service, food, overall value.

END

Where is Peter Zakharov?

Chapter 1, from: *Would You Go? First Journey to Mars*

<https://www.amazon.com/Would-You-First-Journey-Mars-e-book/dp/B0BHZDXXP7/>

April 2, 2035, Aboard Orion Deep Space Transport

One hundred million miles from Earth, astronaut Brian Schwab, commander of the six-person first human mission to Mars, went in search of cosmonaut Peter Zakharov. Brian had something important to discuss with his Russian crewmate.

Peter was not in his cabin, nor in the crew lounge or the gym. Next, he checked the greenhouse, where he found astronaut Sydney Walsh busy charting vegetable growth. Brian's message was for Peter's ears only, but first he had to find him and he asked Sydney to assist. Once found, Brian would talk to Peter privately. He and Sydney continued the search together.

After reaching the rear-most section, the engine compartment, and finding no sign of Peter, Sydney asked Brian if he had looked in the airlock, the small space used only for leaving and re-entering the ship. Brian had not.

The pair quickly floated forward to the airlock. Peter was not in it, but only five spacesuits hung on the rack next to the airlock door.

Sydney checked the name on each spacesuit. "Peter's suit is not here. He's got to be outside."

"My God! How could he go outside, alone, without alerting us?"

Sydney smirked. "I warned you about Peter. A mad Russian."

That's ironic, thought Brian. *I am looking for Peter to warn him about you.*

If Peter went outside, alone, it could not be good. Brian turned to another, more general thought. *How did we come to this?* He tried to connect the dots, to make some sense of how he and his wife had become part of an increasingly bizarre and dangerous mission. His mind raced back three years, to the day in March 2032 when Congress authorized funding for this mission. Big news, then. Congress did not say when to go, just authorized NASA to proceed. Here's the money, get to it.

Then that fateful meeting of the NASA board, where the decision was made to launch in 2035. *Did NASA consider all that could go wrong?*

He remembered the excitement he and Nicole felt over the possibility of being on the first Mars mission. So they applied. He, the seasoned astronaut, and she, a top-notch surgeon. Just the skills NASA needed. They were accepted.

Then came the training. First alone, then with the two other chosen couples.

Then the trial month in low Earth orbit. All went well, that month. They even nicknamed the experience "Kumbaya," which did not really mean "harmony," but everyone thought of it that way.

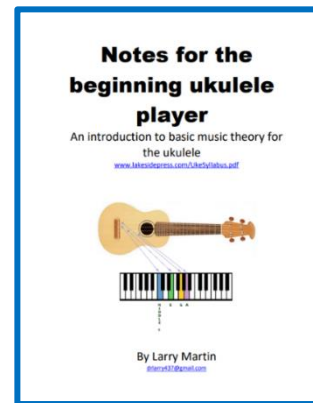
Then the mission launch a mere three months ago. Six highly-trained professionals, a 300-foot-long well-stocked spaceship, and a planned eight-month voyage.

Then...

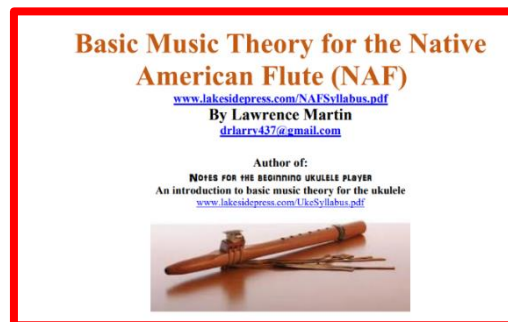
Stop dwelling on the past! No point...I can't change it. Now, where the hell is Peter Zakharov?

Appendix E: Excerpts from Music Syllabi

[Basic Music Theory for Ukulele – Preface to Syllabus](#)



[Basic Music Theory for Native American Flute – Introduction to Syllabus](#)



[Basic Music Theory for Piano – Introduction to Syllabus](#)



[Music Modes Explained – First Two Pages](#)

Ukulele

<http://www.lakesidepress.com/UkeSyllabus.pdf>

Notes for the Beginning Ukulele Player

PREFACE

The ukulele is not easy but is easier than most other instruments for an adult to learn – compared, say, to the dulcimer, guitar, piano, or any wind instrument. It also has advantages over three flute-like instruments adults are often drawn to as beginning instruments -- the recorder, the Native American flute, and the pennywhistle. Those wind instruments are not designed to play chords, just the melody line, so they are more limited than the uke, which can do both.

For beginners, one of the best things about the ukulele is that most uke clubs are very welcoming. In a typical club session no one can hear you (except perhaps the person sitting next to you). If you joined any other instrument group – playing flute, horn, guitar or dulcimer, for example – with the same level of inexperience, you would be outed instantly. The uke is forgiving because it doesn't carry far and in a jam session good players or singers usually provide the rhythm and melody. In many sessions where I have fumbled on chord changes or lost the strum pattern, no one has ever noticed (as far as I am aware).

The downside of this easy acceptability is that most people who play in a uke group get by with just strumming along, so there's little incentive to learn about the makeup of individual chords, what notes are generated by the finger patterns, or why certain chords are played in some songs and not others. People just come to play and have fun. Which makes sense -- the club is not a classroom...

...This syllabus is by a novice who became interested in how the ukulele works, and now wants to teach other beginners. In that sense the Syllabus has a unique perspective. It helps that I know what we don't know. Before playing the uke I had no musical knowledge and played no other instrument. I am far from what anyone would call a "musician." I am not a music teacher, but prefer to consider myself a "music explainer." If you play the uke, and have any interest in how the instrument "works" to make music, you should find this syllabus helpful. It is also chock full of links to internet videos and other sources to enhance your understanding.

Native American Flute

<http://www.lakesidepress.com/NAFSyllabus.pdf>

Introduction

www.lakesidepress.com/PianoSyllabus.pdf

Music theory is a huge subject, one whose study can become quite complex. *Basic Music Theory for Adult Beginner-Level Piano Players* covers the subject selectively. The emphasis, as stated in the subtitle, is on the one aspect I believe MOST USEFUL for adults who wish to review some basic music theory: **half steps and whole steps**. (Some sources use the term semitones for whole steps and half tones for half steps; in this syllabus I will stick with half steps and whole steps.)

This syllabus does not cover some other important aspects of basic music theory, such as note durations, rhythm and time signatures. After the appendices you will find a list of Additional Recommended Resources related to basic music theory, for those who wish to delve further.

In studying music theory, I have been surprised and confounded that most written materials on the subject (books, monographs, websites) tend to under-emphasize the concept of half steps and whole steps. It's surprising, because the simple method of counting half and whole steps can enhance understanding of music scales, chords and intervals, as well as "music keys" and "modes."

I am a beginner-level player, not a trained pianist. This might be considered the ultimate 'chutzpah', to write a music theory syllabus when not a true musician. However, it's not as crazy as it sounds. First, I am a professional writer, with 20 books to date, plus two other syllabuses on music theory, one for the ukulele and one for the Native American flute. Both are free and available online.

<http://www.lakesidepress.com/UkeSyllabus.pdf>
<http://www.lakesidepress.com/NAFSyllabus.pdf>

Second, as a beginner-level piano player and student of music theory, I recognize the confusion often generated by experts who write on the subject. I think the confusion arises because experts often don't realize what beginners don't know, and they don't go to proper lengths to explain the subject. A good example of this is in the area of music modes. (See Appendix B for my explanation of modes.) Going to "proper lengths" in explaining music theory to beginner-level players should include repetition, questions with answers, and audio examples, and I have incorporated these elements into each section of the syllabus.

In summary, this syllabus is for a specific audience, adults who consider themselves at the beginner to near-intermediate level and seek a better understanding of music theory, specifically scales, chords, intervals, keys, and modes. If you're not sure what level you're at, check out Appendix E. Of course, players of any skill level are welcome to peruse this syllabus; just keep in mind that it's basic theory, stuff an advanced player probably knows backwards and forwards.

Piano

www.lakesidepress.com/PianoSyllabus.pdf

Introduction

www.lakesidepress.com/PianoSyllabus.pdf

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Music Modes Explained: First two pages of Appendix B, Basic Music Theory for Beginner-level Piano Players

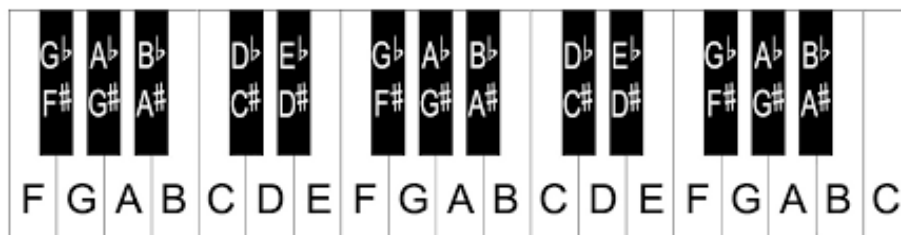
www.lakesidepress.com/PianoSyllabus.pdf

Understanding music modes is not essential to playing the piano; they are really of more interest to composers. However, I kept coming across the term, and in trying to understand modes, found the online and printed book explanations confusing and convoluted. So I wrote my own explanation, using the concept of whole and half steps to make sense of the subject. Since modes is not a subject beginning (or even advanced) piano players need to bother with, I put my explanation in the Appendix. But if it interests you, read on.

Modes are confusing to many non-musicians and people new to music, not least because practically everything written about them is either overly complex, or so simplistic that nothing is really explained. The Wikipedia entry for modes spends most of its verbiage on arcane historical aspects, and only at the end does it get to “Modern Western Modes,” but by then the non-musician is apt to feel bewildered. On the other extreme, many web sites – including YouTube videos on the subject – fail to clarify the differences and similarities among terms like “modes,” “scales,” “minor scale,” “major scale,” etc. Instead these terms are thrown out willy-nilly, without clear explanation.

Modes have encompassed a lot of musical patterns over the centuries of musical history, but today the term “mode” is generally used to mean one of seven specific sequences of musical notes. *In this context a mode is a specific sequence of whole steps and half steps that begins on one note and ends on the same note an octave higher, e.g., C to C or D to D.*

There are 7 commonly-recognized music modes, each with a different sequence of half steps and whole steps. They are best demonstrated by starting on a specific white note of the keyboard and playing *only white notes* until you get to the same note an octave higher. These sequences are listed in the table below the keyboard (W refers to “whole step” and h to “half step”).



| <u>MODE</u> | <u>SEQUENCE OF NOTES</u> | <u>STEPS</u> | <u>Another name:</u> |
|-------------|--------------------------|---------------|----------------------|
| Ionian | C D E F G A B C | W-W-h-W-W-W-h | Major scale |
| Dorian | D E F G A B C D | W-h-W-W-W-h-W | |
| Phrygian | E F G A B C D E | h-W-W-W-h-W-W | |
| Lydian | F G A B C D E F | W-W-W-h-W-W-h | |
| Mixolydian | G A B C D E F G | W-W-h-W-W-h-W | |
| Aeolian | A B C D E F G A | W-h-W-W-h-W-W | Natural Minor scale |
| Locrian | B C D E F G A B | h-W-W-h-W-W-W | |

Note that *any* two adjacent keys – black or white – are a half step apart. For example, C-C# are a half step apart, as are E-F and B-C. Any two keys with one key in between them are a whole step apart. For example, C-D are a whole step apart, as are E-F# and B-C#. What you really have with each new mode is a different sequence of half steps and whole steps, and it is this specific sequence that defines each mode.

Historically, the term “mode” and not “scale” was used for all these note sequences, going back to the ancient Greeks. Over time, the term for two particular modes – ionian and aeolian – came to be called “scales.” Today we call the ionian mode the major scale, and the aeolian mode the minor scale (more specifically, the natural minor scale). The term “mode” is still used for the other note sequences.

Confusion alert. This variation in terminology is one reason for confusion generated by many articles and web videos about modes. Although all 7 modes are variations on whole-step half-step sequences, only two of the variations are now called “scales”; the other five are still called “modes.”

So, both “mode” and “scale” are simply a sequence of 7 notes. When you add in the repeat of the first note, you get the distinctive pattern of whole steps and half steps shown in the table above. Whole steps and half steps are best appreciated on the piano keyboard, shown above. (Each black key can be labeled as a sharp or a flat.)

The seven modes, with their sequence of whole steps and half steps, are shown in another table, below. Note that the **ionian mode** is also the **major scale**, and the **aeolian mode** is the **minor scale**. (Again, the aeolian mode is the natural minor scale. There are two other minor scales, the harmonic minor and melodic minor, which are not represented by any of these modes.)

| | w | w | h | w | w | w | h | w | w | h | w | w | h | |
|-------------------|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|---|---|-------------|
| C Ionian Mode | C | D | E F | G | A | B C | D | E F | G | A | B C | | | MAJOR SCALE |
| D Dorian Mode | D | E F | G | A | B C | D | E F | G | A | B C | | | | |
| E Phrygian Mode | E | F | G | A | B C | D | E F | G | A | B C | | | | |
| F Lydian Mode | F | G | A | B C | D | E F | G | A | B C | | | | | |
| G Mixolydian Mode | G | A | B C | D | E F | G | A | B C | | | | | | |
| A Aeolian Mode | A | B C | D | E F | G | A | B C | | | | | | | MINOR SCALE |
| B Locrian Mode | B | C | D | E F | G | A | B C | | | | | | | |

This table emphasizes the point that each mode can be determined by starting on a successive note of the C major scale (white keys only). In this way all the half steps are B-C and E-F. Again, the term “minor scale” in this table is the natural minor scale. (Table is from http://www.lotusmusic.com/lm_modes.html.)

- If you start on C and play C-D-E-F-G-A-B-C you will get the C ionian mode sequence, which is W-W-h-W-W-W-h. This is also the sequence for the major scale. The ionian mode and the major scale are synonymous.

- If you start on D and play D-E-F-G-A-B-C-D you will get the D dorian mode sequence, which is W-h-W-W-W-h-W. This mode does not have another scale name. It goes by the name of the root note and “dorian.” Thus if you start the scale on D it is “D dorian”; if you start on E it is “E dorian,” etc.
- If you start on E and play E-F-G-A-B-C-D-E you will get the E phrygian Mode sequence, which is h-W-W-W-h-W-W. This mode does not have another scale name. It goes by the name of the root note and “phrygian.” Thus if you start the scale on E it is “E phrygian”; if you start on F it is “F phrygian,” etc.
- If you start on A and play A-B-C-D-E-F-G-A you will get the aeolian mode sequence, which is W-h-W-W-h-W-W. This is also the sequence for the natural minor scale. The aeolian mode and natural minor scale are synonymous.

Similarly, the other four modes have a unique sequence of half steps and whole steps.



Joanna, Amy, and Rachel Martin

Photo taken on Amy's wedding day, August 7, 2016

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