

DISPATCHES

SPRING, 2024



DISPATCHES

Saving History One Story at a Time

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Higher Headquarters Staff

Managing Editor: Dane Zeller
Content Editor: Sue Rushford
Content Editor: Nancy Panko
Content Editor: Patricia Walkow
Content Editor: Nancy Wakeley
Content Editor: Sheila Grimes
Writing Advisor: Associate Professor of
English, Alexandra Youmans
Layout and Design: Andrea Reider

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OUR SILLY FEARS



Five years ago, at a writing seminar in Tucson, I struck up a conversation with a Marine poet. I mentioned my great-great-grandfather who had joined the 74th Wisconsin Volunteers in the civil war.

“And then what?” asked Pete.

I sipped my coffee. I told him I didn’t know. He hadn’t told his story. It ended with him.

“You ought to join a military writing group,” said Pete. So, I did. I googled “military writing groups” and found MWSA. And so, through a chance

conversation, a poet’s recommendation, and a near random search of the internet, I found people who shared my goal of leaving a story behind.

I am now editor-in-chief of *Dispatches*. I believe we all have a responsibility to our family, friends, neighbors, and to even strangers, to share our stories.

From my experience, fear stands in our way. Fear of making a mistake. Fear of offending someone. Fear of not remembering the details. Fear of looking silly. And the granddaddy of them all, fear of what we may discover about ourselves.

Well, tish and tosh, you’ve faced fear before. Write your damned story. Send it to dispatches@mwsa.com.

We’ll help you.

Dane Zeller

UPCOMING SAN DIEGO CONFERENCE— PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE



Attending a writing conference marks one of the key differences between a professional writer and somebody who strings words together as a hobby.

Our mission is to help members, current and future, to leave their stories behind. In San Diego we will:

- Conduct classes that will teach us the craft and the business of writing.
- Provide a gathering where we can communicate and commiserate with our peers. You may find a mentor or be a mentor. This will be an opportunity to inspire or be inspired.
- Take notes, ask probing questions, and find out what you should read to continue your task of leaving a story behind—even after the conference.
- Yes, Zoom and Facebook and email are cheaper. But you can’t share a coffee or a beer or a chat or a smile or a funny or dramatic story electronically.
- We share common experiences and a common goal. Make it a point to share in the best possible way: come to San Diego in September.

IMPORTANT: Stay at the host hotel to maximize your time talking to others, learning how they approach things. If you can double up on a room “great,” it will save money and increase the time you have to expand your knowledge base.

It’s six months until our conference in San Diego. I recommend you secure a room before the “room block” is full.

(<https://book.passkey.com/go/MWSA2024>),

Make your plans to shake my hand at the conference.

jim greenwald, president

“HOW LONG DO YOU THINK UNTIL THE SUN GOES DOWN?”

By Jessica Conoley

My voice warms with the golds and reds of tonight’s impending sunset.

Thoughtful silence fills the front porch. Grandpa announces, “Fifteen minutes.” I reach to his left arm, taking his large hand in my slender fingers. My other hand works to liberate his metal watch. Removing the watch requires careful attention so I don’t catch his papery skin in the elasticized metal band. I slide the timepiece over his wrist and around his arthritic fingers; he holds out both hands letting me place it secure in his grip.

Flat Kansas horizon stretches the rest of eternity before us. Purples and pinks join where blue used to reside. We watch the sun slide under the split rail fence and start to fall to the horizon. I hear



his steady breath mingle with the buzz of summer insects and the occasional clang of gravel against the bottom of a passing vehicle. My bare toes wiggle in the dry dirt at the bottom of the porch, the dust refreshing after a day of work, high heels, and corporate America.

His raspy voice stretches across the front porch, finding me on the cement steps where I sit. “Honey, there’s nothing wrong with me. I’m just going crazy.”

“I know Grandpa.” I stifle a laugh as I turn over my shoulder, looking to his face. In less than half a second, I know my real Grandpa is here. His ash blue eyes register my mom’s front porch; slot me into the appropriate part of his brain as his granddaughter. There is only clarity.

“HOW LONG DO YOU THINK UNTIL THE SUN GOES DOWN?” *continued*

I smile; it has been so long since he has seen me.

“I got a new car.” I tell him, “It’s the same color Grandma’s Oldsmobile was.”

“What kind did you get?”

“A Mini Cooper. BMW makes them.”

“They used to make jet engines, for the war. That’s how they got started.”

“The speedometer says it’ll go 130. I got it up to 117 in California. Don’t tell Mom.” I turn back to the horizon, not wanting to miss the last hot sliver of today fade unrecognized.

Sadness creeps into his voice, “You don’t need to worry about me telling anyone, honey.”

I catch my breath trying to decide what to say next, there are a million memories I need to hear again, to make sure I know the story’s right. Ninety years of stories, and he’s the only one left who knows them.

“Where’s the red dog?” he asks.

“Back yard. He went swimming in the pond today. Smells awful... During the

war, when you were on the planes did you guys have BMW engines?”

“No, ours were being made over here.”

“What’d Grandma do, while you were flying?”

“Who?”

I spoke up, slower this time, “GRANDMA. GOLDIE.”

“Who?”

“Goldie. Your wife.”

“Goldie...” his voice trails off, as he tries to place the name.

We sit and wait. Him clutching his watch in both hands, observing the round gold face as the minutes pass. Me clutching his memories, in charge of reminding him of tonight’s chosen time for dusk. When the sun finally sets, we will compare the clock to the world, and that will be the end of our game. The only prize the memory of our last shared summer sunset. ■

<http://www.jessicaconoley.com>

MY CAR THINKS IT IS MY MENTOR

By Patricia Walkow

When I opened my e-mail this morning, I was surprised to see one from my car. It informed me the air pressure was low on my front passenger-side tire.

I am not making this up.

The dealer coded my e-mail address into the car's computer memory during the purchasing process. The intent was to provide an easy way for them to notify me about service appointments, recalls, or anything else they considered important.

This morning's brief e-mail about low tire pressure made me think about contemporary cars compared to their predecessors. Things have changed. Some for the better, but not all.

Take cupholders, for example. Best invention ever.

No, wait, that would be air conditioning. Until a person has driven to



work while wearing nylon pantyhose on an August ninety-degrees-and-seventy-five-percent-humidity day in an automobile without air conditioning, it is difficult to appreciate how climate control is more important than an engine. Or axles. Or a drivetrain. We expect all equipment to be functioning—they are the very essence of a car. But

air conditioning should be an absolute requirement. Just ask anyone who wears underwear made of synthetic fabric.

Don't forget the value of heated seats when it's cold outside—three levels of heat. And for warmer weather, the seats are vented. I am waiting for a massage option.

My car has a heated steering wheel. Is the cooling version on its way?

Windows: tinted, automatic, lockable. Does a person under thirty-five know what a manual window control looks like? Or how to operate one?

MY CAR THINKS IT IS MY MENTOR *continued*

Keyless entry, remote entry, remote start. When will we be able to beam ourselves into the car straight from our beds?

Mission Control-like, the control panel dominates much of the dashboard. With it, the driver uses the car's many bells, whistles, and functions. Mine looks like a giant cell phone. I connect to the web from it, and it manages my cell phone and offers me a million-and-one options for being completely distracted from the purpose of being in the car: driving.

Do I want to order a pizza? Go ahead.

Talk to my investment broker? Sure.

Check my fuel economy statistics for the previous 2,000 times I started the vehicle? No problem.

Check the weather radar? It's a snap.

Browse 1,001 radio stations or plug in my phone to listen to music? No sweat.

Meanwhile, if I dare deflect my eyes from the road ahead, even for half a second, I will get a warning ding or dashboard text commanding me to "Pay Attention" or "Watch the Road." What's next? An electric shock?

The car has placed me in a Catch-22 situation. I must control the majority of its options and settings from the control panel, but I'm a bad girl if I look at it when I do.

Let's not forget adaptive cruise control and collision avoidance. Handy features. When they're set, my trusty auto will slow

down if the car in front of me is too close. I know this from experience. And my car will stop—fast and hard—if it senses an imminent collision. I also know this from experience.

The backup camera is a godsend. Now, I don't have to turn around to avoid obstacles because that little camera has a greater field of vision than the human eye. I remember the time I sat in my brother-in-law's car when this kind of equipment was new, as he demonstrated how it worked. I had parked my car behind his. During his demo, this innovative technology allowed me to see him back his Toyota into my Subaru.

My car has a front camera, too. Hey, am I not supposed to be looking forward when I'm in drive gear, anyway?

While driving, I can activate the lane departure switch to advise me when I'm drifting from my lane. Hate it. I turn it off. Sometimes, we all need to stray a little.

The blind spot detector warns me there is some sort of transport to my side that might not be visible in my mirrors. A little light on the side mirror will illuminate. If I can't see those little lights, does it mean my medical plan will pay for eyelid lift surgery?

My car has a variety of beeps and chimes. There are so many of them that I believe the manufacturer should provide a weird-sound glossary on the control

MY CAR THINKS IT IS MY MENTOR *continued*



panel. It makes me wonder. If the car can make a noise at me, why can't it just TELL me what hidden rule I am violating?

Then there is that catchall notification I dread most—the check engine light. Its meaning is ambiguous, but its intent is clear: take the car to the dealer to be diagnosed by an artificial intelligence (AI) system that's more advanced than the one already programmed into the car itself. Also clear: it is going to cost me money to find out why the light is illuminated. And often, the check engine light may mean something relatively trivial, like “the gas cap is not tight,” but it could also mean “the engine is going to blow up in fifteen seconds.” As a dutiful owner, I take the car to be fixed. Except no one fixes much on a car anymore. They just

replace. Replace. Replace. Are mechanics becoming an endangered species?

My latest car—Gray Thunder—thinks she is my friend and teacher. The first time I took her home, I set up a profile of myself. I told her my name, and she snapped some kind of an image of my face and stored it in her databank; I set my seat and mirror positions and instructed her to remember my preferences. As a result, when I enter the automobile, Gray Thunder greets me by name with a friendly electronic message on a small screen on the dashboard and adjusts everything to my liking.

Most of the time.

If I am wearing sunglasses one day and not the next, she may forget who I am. If my husband drives my vehicle for several sessions in a row, she might not recognize me any longer when I take the driver's seat. One of these days, I expect her to say, “Who the hell are you? Get out.”

The GPS can be a confused little soul. It can tell me how to get from Albuquerque to Intercourse, Pennsylvania, but has no clue how to get to the supermarket, a mere four miles away from my house. It directs me to drive north in order to go south when there is no reason at all to head north.

Thanks a lot.

Planning to purchase a new car soon? I hope you can lift at least ten pounds.

MY CAR THINKS IT IS MY MENTOR *continued*

No, that's not the key. It's the set of manuals: Sirius Radio, Bluetooth and Connectivity, Troubleshooting Guide, Tire Care, Roadside Assistance Instructions, Maintenance Schedules, and more. My set weighs eleven pounds.

The last time my husband purchased a car was in January, and I didn't see him until April, when he finally finished reading everything.

The smallest booklet is the operator's guide. Its slim profile is a tribute to the reliability of today's cars. Remember all that stuff that makes it a car? That

equipment is OK. It's the rest of the content that makes me realize I can't go for a simple drive anymore.

And if I need to *read* one of those tomes, I have to stop to do it. Gone are the days when I could peer at something while driving. Something like a map. Remember? These days, Gray Thunder will reprimand me for diverting my eyes from the road ahead.

Auto-scolding, I think it's called, preparing me for the day when she will take over all driving tasks. ■



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MY WAR STORY

Oliver Pierce

as told to Nancy Panko

A FOUR-PART SERIES—PART 1

My name is Oliver Pierce, Ollie for short. I want to share my Vietnam experience because, like others who returned from that deployment, it changed my life in many ways. As a nineteen-year-old, I was deployed to Vietnam from June 15, 1970, through May 21, 1971. It has been over 50 years since I was in that country, so my memories of places and incidents may be a little off.

Folks don't realize that once you have hunted and been hunted by another human being, you're changed forever. That feeling never leaves—not even through counseling. Drugs and alcohol help numb the feeling, sometimes. Every combat soldier will deal with the hunter/hunted feeling for the rest of their lives. At least with counseling, you learn to deal with it, control it, and keep it in the back of your mind. When you first return from a combat tour, you are in a heightened, defensive, sometimes aggressive

emotional state. It takes a while to settle down. Some GIs succeed at this, but a lot don't.

I was a noncommissioned officer (NCO), E-5 assigned to the 65th Engineer Battalion, 25th Infantry Division in Cu Chi. This place was massive, the size of a small city. I was put on a truck that was part of a convoy going to Cu Chi, about fifty miles from Long Binh. Upon arrival, I was issued uniforms, combat gear, a flak jacket, and my new M16 rifle. After that, I was given a footlocker and taken to my barracks. I was only trained with an M14 rifle during basic and Advanced Infantry Training. There would be a learning curve.

A typical day at Cu Chi was roll call at daybreak, breakfast, and assignments for the regular 10- to 12-hour day. We'd chill out after supper at the barracks, or in my case, the NCO Club. It wasn't unusual to see someone with a Spider Monkey as a pet. There was always a card

MY WAR STORY *continued*

game going on in one of the barracks. Of course, there was drinking or drug use somewhere, and always music. There was even a Massage Parlor in the camp that everyone went to. I would visit it myself later in my tour.

Before I arrived, the 65th Engineers had lost all but one bulldozer and their operators in Cambodia. So, I was it, along with a lone dozer. I was assigned to push up laterite piles with the machine. Laterite is a type of small volcanic rock plentiful in Vietnam and used on roads because it packed down hard.

Since there was only one bulldozer, they didn't want to send it into the jungle and risk losing it to enemy bombs, mines, or other hostile fire. The officers decided to assign me to a motor grader. I told them I didn't know how to operate a grader, but they said, "You're an NCO—so learn because we're sending you into the field shortly." I got a manual, learned how to operate the dang grader, and practiced on the road leading to the laterite piles.

Finally, it was my turn to head out into the jungle. At this point, I had not yet seen what war was like in Vietnam. My officer at the time told me I didn't need to pack much because I'd be gone for only two days. There was a road that needed to be reshaped, and mud that had to be pushed out of the compound area.

I grabbed what gear I thought I would need for those two days and left all my other stuff in my locked footlocker in the barracks. Two days turned into two weeks.

I loaded my grader up on a flatbed truck and rode with the truck driver to the other Base Camp, half a day away. Upon arrival, we pulled close to a makeshift motor pool. I didn't know where to go or who I was supposed to report to. There was one guy that was standing outside, and we introduced ourselves. He said his name was Billy, and I said, "Hi, my name is Ollie." As we were talking, a mortar round hit. I was confused and dazed. Then Billy and several others hollered, "Incoming!" Everyone was jumping in holes, bunkers, and anywhere there was cover. Billy dove under a dump truck. In a state of confusion, I ran back to my grader and dove under the flatbed. There were two more explosions. One of them was very close. After a couple of minutes, I heard somebody holler, "All clear." I got up and walked back towards Billy and the dump truck. I was shaking from head to toe and laughing nervously. I had just survived my first mortar attack. I glanced down at Billy and said, "Wow, man, that was really something!" Billy never moved. A piece of shrapnel had hit him. He was dead. This was what war was really like—my first meeting with death.

MY WAR STORY *continued*

From that day on, I never introduced myself with my first name, only used my last name. It's easier to let someone go, if you don't make friends and only use your last name. It was less personal. I felt a lot of guilt from this ordeal because I laughed instead of realizing what had happened to another soldier. Survivor guilt is one of the things I had to work on in counseling years later.

I stayed at this support base for a couple of days, then they sent me and my grader to another base not too far away. This base also had a lot of mud buildup from the monsoon season. My job was to clear the mud from around the tents and hoochs. Unfortunately, neither of the assignments to these infantry units had me down as another soldier to feed. There were no C-rations appropriated for me. The only food I got during this time was what some of the soldiers voluntarily gave me. I also bartered, pushing mud for some food, beer, and cigarettes. I stayed hungry a lot.

I returned to the first base after a few days. I learned there had been several more mortar attacks on this compound, resulting in injuries but no more deaths. They were trying to figure out how the VC were so accurate and able to hit the bunkers and buildings. One day, someone noticed an old Papasan, who was cleaning out the outhouses, stepping off the

distance from the compound razor wire to a couple of buildings. He was captured, held, and arrested until a South Vietnamese interpreter arrived to help interrogate him. They came by chopper, and quickly went to work. The old Papasan was beaten with a bamboo stick, hit, and kicked until he would tell them what they wanted to hear. As I witnessed this type of torture, in my nineteen-year-old mind, I was thinking, "Man, this is brutal. They do these things in a war zone." After the interrogation, they loaded him into the chopper they had come in and took off. As they did a banking maneuver over the hill where the mortars came from, they threw the old Papasan out of the helicopter. Then, the chopper disappeared out of sight. As I looked around, no one seemed disturbed over what had just happened. I had witnessed my second casualty of the war.

As a new guy, I heard dark stories about life in the jungle in Vietnam. I was told of the different types of boobytraps. Handmade land mines were placed on roads, and in the jungle, grenades were hooked to trip wires. It was common to have snipers in trees and tunnels underground—they'd pop up, shoot, then disappear. Mortar and rocket attacks occurred anytime, day or night, even when you're squatting to take a shit. These don't even cover the other inhumane, barbaric things the enemy thought of. The Viet Cong (VC)

MY WAR STORY *continued*

& the North Vietnamese Army's (NVA) philosophy was an injured soldier was just as good as a dead soldier because it usually took two or three others to care for the wounded one. It was simple math—fewer combatants when there are wounded.

After a couple of days, my grader and I were sent out to another support base. This one was on the top of a hill, and consisted of a berm of dirt, razor wire, and tents. Until now, I was only drinking beer, some liquor, and smoking Marlboros

mostly because of the stress of being in a war zone. After a couple of days, I was notified that the 65th engineers wanted me back in Cu Chi. ■



To Be Continued: The Rise of Degraderman

Nancy Panko



GOING UP

By Michael Lund

At the Richmond, Virginia Veterans Medical Center one cold December day, five people enter the elevator on the main floor: four older male veterans (one white) and one (masked) young staff member, female, standing at the back to give room.

The Army soldier (his cap tells us) while sitting in a wheelchair and talking through a white mask, asks another, “How are you today?”

The other man (also Army) responds, “Every day on this side of the grass is a good day.” He is using a cane.

Chuckling, a third veteran (Navy) says, “You got that right!” We all chuckle.

The elevator stops at Three, but no one gets on or off. Doors close, a voice says, “Going up.”

The first man: “Now, I hear some say it’s even better on the other side.” More energetic—but a little bit raspy—chuckling.

The younger woman in the back sighs, “I sure do hope so!”

The first man says, “Well now, I don’t know. I don’t hear about anyone wanting to go there early.”

All: “Amen!”

Door opens. All exit.

Dr. Michael Lund, Professor Emeritus of English at Longwood University, is a native of Rolla, Missouri, and lives in Virginia. In addition to having published scholarly books and articles about 19th- and 20th-century British and American literature, he is the author of novels inspired by Route 66, America’s Mother Road. He currently is working on a novel series set in a small coastal Carolina village. Lund also directs Home and Abroad, a free writing program for military, veterans, and family, in rural central Virginia. He was a U.S. Army correspondent at Fort Campbell, Kentucky (1969-70) and in Vietnam (1970-71). ■

TAKING AN HONOR FLIGHT

By Thomas Keating

In September, I flew in an Honor Flight, organized by Honor Flight New England, of New Hampshire. They are one of the hubs in “The Honor Flight Network,” a national nonprofit organization comprised of independent hubs that give our nation’s veterans the appreciation and honor they deserve.

When I inquired two years ago, they suggested I wait till they finished flying all the World War II and Korean veterans. Those veterans were getting on in years, many in wheelchairs, and Honor Flight was anxious to get them on a flight. So, I waited. I finally received my flight notice this fall.

Every veteran on the trip is required to have a guardian, to help with wheelchairs, climbing stairs, et cetera. I don’t have any mobility issues, but many others did. Life, and the effects of their wartime service, affected their health. My neighbor Ted Cooper agreed to be my guardian. That’s me on the left...

(all photos courtesy of Honor Flight New England)

The flight left Boston’s Logan Airport at 6AM, in front of a cheering crowd of people and a marching band. Delta



donated our flight to Dulles in Washington, D.C. It was raining when we arrived in DC, where we were met by more cheering crowds as we boarded our coaches to begin the tours. With perfect timing, the rain stopped.

Our first destination was the World War II memorial. It is a grand memorial, located at the east end of the reflecting pool, across the street from the Washington Monument. Designed as a large plaza, it was surrounded by columns depicting each state, tied together by a bronze rope as a symbol of the unity of the nation. Various bas-reliefs presented elements of America’s war effort, at home and in the key battles that occurred: Normandy, The Battle of The Bulge, Women

TAKING AN HONOR FLIGHT *continued*

in the military, to name a few. Two of our Honor Flight members, both ninety-plus years of age, were veterans of that war, and they marveled at its size and grandeur.



Our next stop was the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The massive black granite wall has been called “the Vietnam War Veterans’ altar of sacrifice,” and large groups of people come every day to pray and remember.

I have visited this site many times, (see my story, “*Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Then and Now*, *DISPATCHES* Fall 2020). Today, I wanted to pay respects to two names on the Wall. Alan was a young man from my town, who died while saving one of his men, and another, Captain Carlson, died and was not recovered when his Air Force F-5 fighter was shot down. I laid a red rose at the base of each panel where their names appear and said a silent prayer for both.

We then walked over to the Korean War Veterans Memorial, on the other



side of the reflecting pool. It is stunning. There are three elements to the Memorial. First, a group of larger-than-life steel statues depicting an infantry squad emerging from the woods, each carefully detailed, all covered with ponchos, helmets, weapons (Browning Automatic Rifle [BAR], M2 carbines, M1 rifles) incredibly sculpted details and just powerful images of what Army, Marines and Air Force members experienced there. A black granite wall of remembrance surrounds the Pool of Remembrance. It lists all US personnel and Republic of Korea personnel who were killed or missing



TAKING AN HONOR FLIGHT *continued*

from that conflict. Finally, there is a Wall of Reflection along the path leading to the Pool. The mural, representing those forces that supported the combat forces, depicts Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force and Coast Guard personnel and their equipment. The etchings are arranged to give a wavy appearance in harmony with the layout of the statues. Remarkable memorial.

Our next stop, as we gulped down our box lunches from Arby's, was the Arlington National Cemetery across the Potomac. Over four hundred thousand service people are buried there. It is beautifully kept, so very peaceful. We were welcomed at the Tomb of The Unknown to watch the changing of the guard.

We quietly watched, along with other visitors, as the men of the U.S. 3rd Infantry Regiment, known as "The Old Guard," meticulously performed the change. (Today's squad was the "tall squad," every soldier over six feet in height. There is a medium height squad, and a small height squad, which includes female members of the Regiment).

Everyone attended with profound respect and somber faces. I chatted with one of the guides at the Tomb. He told me that they have issues with wildlife: coyotes, foxes, and especially one wild turkey that likes to participate in the ceremonies with the sentries. The guide also told me



that the sentries, who cannot break from their ceremonial mien, would scuff their heels if they saw a veteran. Sure enough, one walked by me on his tour, saw my Vietnam Veteran cap, and scuffed his heel. I felt so honored, and with a small nod of my head, returned the compliment.

We boarded our buses again to drive over to the Marine Corps Memorial. Located next to the Arlington National Cemetery. This massive bronze sculpture commemorates the raising of the US Flag on Mount Suribachi on Iwo Jima, the horrific battle in the Pacific. It was dedicated in 1954.



TAKING AN HONOR FLIGHT *continued*

The figures in the sculpture stand thirty-two feet tall, on a pedestal that is sixty feet high. Altogether the memorial is about seventy-eight feet tall. It was impressive.

We then travelled to the Air Force Memorial, high on a hill overlooking the Pentagon. Three soaring stainless-steel spires, each over two hundred feet high, reaching to the stars, depicting the “Starburst tactic” of fighter aircraft.

Another signature feature of the Air Force Memorial is a bronze sculpture of an Air Force Honor Guard, four, eight-foot-tall figures, providing a human element to the soaring of spires. The Air Force veterans in our group posed together in front of the Honor Guard statues for a photo.



The Memorial also includes two black granite walls bearing the names of all the Air Force Medal of Honor recipients. An additional element is the glass wall etched with the famous “missing man formation” to honor airmen who are missing, giving the visitor a time to reflect. I have to say the memorial accurately reflected the image of the Air Force—technological, efficient, and courageous. A fine salute to the men and women who fly into danger.

After a lovely dinner, we drove to Dulles for our return flight to Boston. As we waited to board our flight, in the lobby of the terminal gate we all clapped and sang the military hymns: “Anchors Away,” “From the Halls of Montezuma,” “The Army Goes Rolling Along,” and “The Wild Blue Yonder.” There was joy in everyone’s face. It was an affirmation of our shared service time and our service fifty years ago. When we boarded our flight, another wonderful crowd cheered us on in the terminal.

TAKING AN HONOR FLIGHT *continued*



Flying back on the plane, I reflected on the day. I am in my seventies, and never expected people would welcome me and appreciate my service in the Vietnam war. I was not overwhelmed with welcome home back then, and this certainly was nice.

Everyone, from the greeters at both airports, to the aircraft crews and everyone at the monuments and memorials warmly welcomed us. I felt my eyes water every time we were cheered in the airports.

Sadly, this is the last big event for me and the other Vietnam veterans. It can be said that we are on “a last-light mission.” (“Last light” was the designation of the last helicopter mission of the day in Vietnam.)

The world has moved on from us. There are three million veterans from the last twenty years of war that are center stage now, and rightfully so. Vietnam Veterans still alive are estimated to be around eight hundred thousand, and that number gets smaller every year. When I read names at the forty-fifth anniversary of the dedication of the Vietnam War Veterans Memorial in November, the crowds were not as large as they were when I read names five years earlier.

I am proud of my service in Vietnam and was so happy to join with fifty men and women who served honorably in a difficult place. It was a joy to be a part of the Honor Flight. ■

COMMA WARS



By John Cathcart

To comma or not to comma, that is the question:

Whether ‘tis nobler in the mind to suffer
 The missing punctuation of outrageous
 run-ons,
 Or to take arms against a sea of commas
 And by opposing end them.

There’s no question that when it comes to writing, my wife is my fiercest critic, editor-in-chief, and most steadfast supporter. For the past 40-plus years, we’ve agreed on almost every subject—except for commas. Rather than continue our never-ending skirmishes, I thought it was time to do a little research. After a bit of

digging, we discovered that we were both right—and wrong.

Personally, when it comes to comma use, I had always subscribed to the Theory of Supplemental Oxygen. According to this theory, if you run out of breath and require supplemental oxygen at the end of a sentence, you’re probably missing a comma or two. Although probably true, is this a useful theory? Will it keep any writer out of trouble on the Comma Wars battlefield?

Given my personal experience as MWSA Awards Director—and as a writer and occasional Commakaze—I thought we all might benefit from a refresher course.

COMMA WARS *continued*

Over the next couple of weeks, I'm going to offer a short series of excerpts from various internet sources, outlining eight basic battlefield rules of engagement for the use of commas. Will this be a dull recitation of something we all slept through—I mean learned—during elementary and high school English classes? Maybe. But perhaps it's worth pointing

out that one could say the same thing about the instructions that came with that new gas grill you bought at Home Depot. You ignore those boring instructions at your peril.

After finishing these articles, if you don't end up winning the Comma Wars, maybe you'll at least be able to arrange a ceasefire.

RULE 1. Use a comma to separate independent clauses

Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction—such as: and, but, yet, so, or, nor, for—when it joins two complete thoughts or ideas (independent clauses).

EXAMPLES

1. Betsy read the author's book, and then she filled out her MWSA scoring sheet.

2. Rob can apply the rules of grammar when writing his novel, or he can suffer the consequences when he doesn't.
3. Jack and Jill went up a hill, but they didn't come down together.

RULE 2. Use a comma after an introductory clause/phrase

COMMA WARS *continued*

This comma informs your reader that you've finished the introductory phrase or clause, and you're getting around to the sentence's central theme.

Examples

1. When Nancy got settled at her desk to read her email, her cat decided it was time to play.

2. After suffering through the book's early chapters, Jim discovered that the book included some worthwhile information.

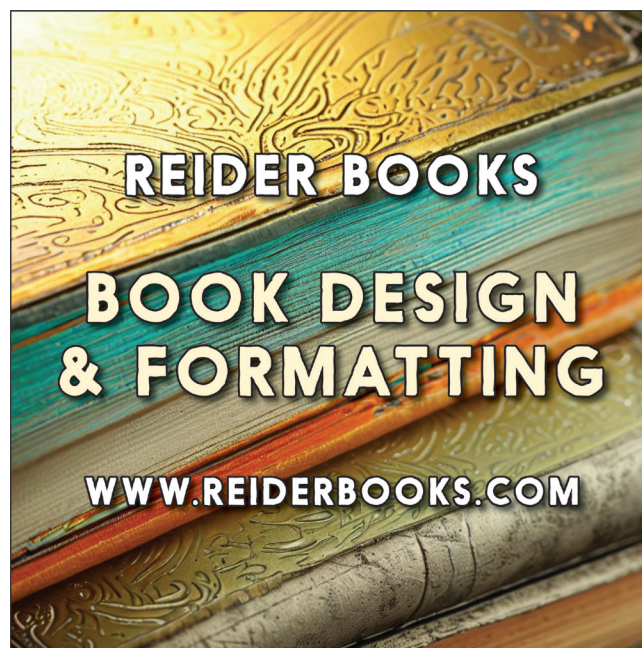
3. Before she knew what was happening, Carolyn's cat jumped on the desk and spilled her tea all over the keyboard.

That's it for this battle in the ongoing Comma Wars. In our next campaign, we'll cover comma use between all items in a series to set off nonrestrictive clauses (is that when Santa isn't enforcing his naughty-and-nice list?).

If you want to jump ahead or download a comma study guide for personal use, you can do an internet search for "comma use." I've found the one offered by Indiana University East very helpful. ■

<https://www.iue.edu/hss/writingcenter/documents/Commas.pdf>

John Cathcart
MWSA Awards Director



EDITING WITH AUTOCRIT

By Valerie Ormond



I learned about the web-based editing application AutoCrit through writers’ circles last year. It looked interesting, and I signed up for the free program thinking I would get to it when I had time. Well, you know how that goes....

So when AutoCrit announced the AutoCrit Line Editing Lab in February, the lab became the catalyst I needed to focus on editing my then work in progress (WIP), *Believing In Horses Out West*. The course description read, “10 days of

group activity, live workshops with the AutoCrit team, and of course, editing!” It was that, and more. The AutoCrit team made it easy to attend sessions by hosting two live sessions daily at 11:00 am and 8:00 pm EST; attendees could attend either or both. The team also supplied a video recording and a copy of the day’s slides delivered to your inbox.

The lab kickstarted my lackluster editing effort and introduced me to the tremendous features of the program. The

VALERIE ORMOND'S THOUGHTS *continued*



Beth P

effervescent Beth hosted the courses and did a phenomenal job of teaching, answering chat questions, and keeping the course interactive. She engaged attendees in ways that made the lab more fun than a one-way conversation.

I discovered the power of AutoCrit and its wealth of editing features broken down by categories including Summary, Pacing & Momentum, Dialogue, Strong Writing, Word Choice, Repetition, Combination, Readability, and Grammar. For an example of the subcategories, see **Strong Writing** shown below.

I learned invaluable lessons about strengths and weaknesses in my writing through the specific categories and subcategories. As a result, I purchased a Professional AutoCrit membership. I saw how using the program improved my WIP, and I plan to apply the lessons learned to future work. I've appreciated being a member of the AutoCrit Member Community with features such as:

- An actual community where authors interact without selling to each other
- Instantaneous tech support
- Live webinars, for instance, “How To Work With Your Cover Artist To Get The Cover You Deserve” featuring artist Lynne Hansen of [Lynne Hansen Art](#). Lynne’s discussion was enlightening, informative, and free to members.

I highly recommend [AutoCrit](#) if you would like to gain new perspectives on your writing and connect with a friendly and helpful writing community. ■



A SUMMARY OF 15 SECRETS SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT TIME MANAGEMENT, PART III

By Dawn Brotherton, author of *The Road to Publishing*



This is a continuation of the lessons I learned when I read Kevin Kruse's *15 Secrets Successful People Know About Time Management*. I highly recommend this book. It has helped me feel more in control of my busy days. Kruse outlines fifteen suggestions to help you get—and stay—organized. Here are the last five on the list.

11. Leverage Your Expertise and Delegate the Rest

Kruse talks about the importance of prioritizing how you spend your time. He quotes the *Harvard Business Review* to explain that 41 percent of time was spent on actions that weren't personally satisfying and could have been done by someone else.

He suggests you drop what you can. Do you really need to be doing it? Does it need to be done? Does it need to be done by you? Maybe you should delegate it. What can you outsource? If you need to be the one to do it, is there a better way?

You might not think you're ready. My first thought when I read this was, I don't have enough money to pay someone else. But Kruse's reasoning is sound. What else could I be doing if I wasn't cleaning the house, making routine follow-up calls, or hanging signs around town? Tasks that I

Lack of direction, not lack of time, is the problem. We all have twenty-four-hour days.

– Zig Ziglar



<https://bluedragonpublishing.com/>

could hire out to free me up to do things only I could do within my company. It was a freeing revelation for me.

Once I decided to make the leap, it was like a burden was lifted from my shoulders. I was trying to do everything, and it was wearing me out. Sharing the burden has given me more time and has allowed me to expand my business to areas I've had on the back burner for a long time.

This step has also brought another key point to light. Being an entrepreneur can be lonely. I've worked with others for so long that when I retired from the Air Force, I missed having someone to bounce ideas off. Hiring another person part-time has rejuvenated me and given me the sounding board I needed to keep the ideas flowing. It has also made me accountable to someone else. Not

literally, of course, but knowing I needed to get a certain task done before we met again has helped me keep various lines of effort moving forward.

Writers' groups can be this accountability group for authors. You may also use this time to discuss marketing strategies, pool resources, and support each other.

Decide where you want to spend your time and what you can outsource. You'll thank yourself.

12. Theme Your Days

This one is my favorite—Theme Your Days. Even my daughters will comment to me that it's "Website Wednesday." My schedule seemed impossible to get a handle on. As an entrepreneur, I could work the hours I wanted to, but that seemed to be most of the hours in my day.

Kruse recommends setting aside certain days for certain chores and sticking to it. Updating my website is not one of my favorite chores. It's time consuming, and once I'm in there, I want to tinker and change things. When I went about theming my days, I blocked off most of Wednesday to work on my website and to learn new things within it. Now if something comes up that I need to add to my website, I paste it in the notes section of

A SUMMARY OF 15 SECRETS SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE *continued*

my calendar for the following Wednesday, so I don't forget to do it. On Wednesday morning, I open my calendar and the notes, and I get to work. Because I am not constantly logging in and out of my website, it saves time.

I start my week by going through all my authors' accounts on Mondays to make sure things are progressing as they should. Tuesdays, I work on social media and schedule posts. I save Thursdays for in-person meetings, so I only have to dress up once. Friday is my writing day.

To me, there is a sense of order to my week now, and I feel like I'm getting more accomplished by following the theme. I try to anchor my calendar on those few things and work other items in around them. Somehow the guilt seems less as well. For example, if I sat down to read, I would think, "I should be doing xyz." Now, I remind myself that I'm doing exactly what I'm supposed to be doing.

13. Touch It Once

Sounds simple, right? For some things, it is. I don't have a problem putting dishes directly into the dishwasher after eating. It's better than piling them in the sink waiting to be loaded. That's an easy example of touch it once.

Kruse gives the example of bringing in the mail. Rather than stack it to look

at it later, sort out the junk mail and trash it before you take it inside. Pay the bills immediately, rather than scanning them now, setting them aside to open them again later. If you have a set time on your calendar when you pay your bills, then take the envelopes unopened and put them in the location predetermined as your bill paying station. Why open them now if you aren't going to do anything about them?

For me, my downfall is email. I have it on my phone as well as my computer. If I'm away from my desk during the day, I will check email on my phone to watch for anything hot. If someone sends me something I can answer quickly, I do. Anything longer has to wait because I hate typing on my phone, but that means I have to look at everything twice. And sometimes, by the time I get back to my desk, new emails have come in that haven't been opened so they draw my eye. The ones I opened on my phone show as open, therefore fade into the background.

I need to remind myself that nothing that is hot should be sent email. I need to wait until I get home and touch it once. That also includes immediately unsubscribing from unwanted email lists. I'm getting better at it, but I've also added an appointment to my calendar on Mondays to clean out my email.

Think of something that you can take care of immediately and be done with it,

A SUMMARY OF 15 SECRETS SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE *continued*

rather than returning to it over and over. Every second you save adds up.

14. Change Your Morning

Kruse stresses the importance of giving yourself some time. And if you don't do it first thing in the morning, it isn't going to get done. Some people spend that time meditating, others workout. Think about stretching while listening to a podcast, killing two birds with one stone. I like to read my Bible while I'm eating breakfast.

Whatever your preference, it's good to turn it into a routine. Don't check your phone or sit at the computer "just for a minute." It will disrupt your flow and throw your day out of whack.

Some key things to consider working into your morning routine are drinking water and eating a good breakfast. Those two things will get you off to a great start. Then do something for you—exercise, meditate, yoga, reading, etc. The idea is that investing in yourself will take you to a higher level of success.

If you are struggling with this concept, another book to consider is *The Miracle Morning* by Hal Elrod. In it, Elrod lays out a system he calls SAVERS: Silence, Affirmations, Visualization, Exercise, Reading, and Scribing.

Give it a try. And remember, it takes at least forty-five days to turn an action

into a habit. Don't give up too quickly. Adjust your routine if you need to, but give yourself time.

15. Energy is Everything

Do you perform better at a certain time of the day? That's when your energy is highest. You can keep up that pace by re-energizing yourself throughout the day.

Our bodies naturally go in cycles where they need to recharge every ninety minutes or so. Pushing through it with coffee or sheer will is not the answer. Kruse gives a few suggestions to get yourself in the habit of recharging your body.

If you can break your schedule down to twenty-five minutes of focused work, followed by five minutes of physical activity, you'll feel much better. During that five minutes, drink a glass of water (also very good for you) or do an exercise. Change it up with a different exercise every break.

I received a Fitbit watch for Christmas that buzzes at ten minutes to the hour if I haven't gotten in my 250 steps in that hour. My husband is getting used to seeing me walking a random path around the house, sometimes stopping to do jumping jacks or stretches. It feels good to get up and move around. Not only does it recharge my brain, it saves my back from too much sitting in one position.

A SUMMARY OF 15 SECRETS SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE *continued*

You can break your work/break schedule at 25, 60, or 90 minutes. Whatever is comfortable for you. The point is to move and recharge. If it's easier for you, try setting a timer.

Other things that can increase your energy include getting enough sleep, minimizing alcohol, minimizing caffeine, eating less processed food, and maintaining

a healthy weight. You already knew that, right?

This series was inspired by Kevin Kruse's *15 Secrets Successful People Know About Time Management*. Invest in yourself and pick up this time management read. You'll amaze yourself with how much of your day you get back. ■





IF WE CAN DO COAUTHORING, YOU CAN TOO!

By Krista Wells

In the realm of writing, collaboration is a powerful tool that can yield remarkable results. Nicole Moleti and I are two women who have defied the odds by coauthoring two traditionally published thriller books while juggling demanding careers and parental responsibilities. We are ready to share our journey, highlighting the benefits of coauthoring and the importance of finding support and synergy in hopes it will inspire others to dive into the idea of coauthoring.

It all started with Nicole saying that after ten years of writing beauty articles,

she had an idea for a fiction book. She called Krista to help with researching the infertility piece because she was passionate about researching those statistics. But one call led to another and transformed into Nicole asking, “How about we write the book together?” Although Krista’s internal response was “I don’t have the time or the talents,” her external response was “Okay, let’s try it.”

Krista, a military spouse life coach, and Nicole, a talented make-up artist and hardworking real estate agent, first discovered their shared passion for their

IF WE CAN DO COAUTHORING, YOU CAN TOO! *continued*

first book while cheering on their sons from the sidelines of a baseball field. Amidst the hustle and bustle of full-time work and raising their respective families, they found solace in their creative outlet, ultimately deciding they could make time for their writing journey even though they had none.

They discovered what they call “pockets of time.” How do you find these pockets? It’s about tapping into your determination and commitment to learning a new craft. They carved out precious moments during lunch breaks, nights after the kids went to bed, and early mornings before anyone got up, utilizing every spare minute to find ways to bring their thrilling stories to life versus scrolling social media. Through their dedication, they have proven that with proper time management and unwavering focus, even the busiest of schedules can accommodate creative projects.

Another key advantage of coauthoring is the built-in support and synergy it provides. Krista and Nicole have become each other’s pillars of strength, pushing one another to surpass their creative boundaries by being each other’s editor. Their shared experiences and perspectives have enriched their storytelling by melding two minds, infusing their narratives with depth and authenticity, and writing two different points of view that might sound

more authentic to the reader because they were conceptualized by two different people. By editing each other’s characters, the overall voice differential isn’t too jarring.

They stay focused on shared values (aren’t afraid to drum up legal contracts) and are grateful they have built in support to bounce ideas off one another. They believe in having engaging, open, and supportive dialogue that creates a collaborative environment in which to fuel their own creativity and propels their writing and overall coauthor brand forward.

Coauthoring offers several other built-in benefits, so if you’re stuck and have another friend who writes or wants to learn to write, consider teaming up and giving it a try.

Firstly, coauthoring alleviates the isolation typically associated with the writing process and scary business side of publishing. The presence of a coauthor provides constant companionship and encouragement when you’re feeling defeated, making the journey less daunting. Additionally, coauthoring allows for the division of all tasks, enabling authors to play to their strengths and work more efficiently. Krista’s book shelf was always filled with positive psychology books, and she likes research, and Nicole has been a thriller reader for years and likes collaborating with independent bookstores. Their complementary skills and

IF WE CAN DO COAUTHORING, YOU CAN TOO! *continued*

expertise have proven invaluable, resulting in a collaboration that, although not void of conflict, overall produces compelling books.

Hopefully our story can serve as a beacon of inspiration, encouraging others with creative ideas to consider coauthoring. They believe that as long as you have shared values, are willing to treat writing like a business, and drum up some ground rules and written agreement of your roles and expectations of each other, you can reap the rewards of writing with someone versus doing every part of it alone. By joining forces, aspiring writers can overcome the challenges of the solitary writing process and create something better than either writer would create in a silo. The everyday support, shared workload (you only need to write half a book!), and diversified knowledge that inevitably fills more gaps can lead to a remarkable synergy that propels the work to new heights and allows you to enjoy the process more. You're pitching your book to an agent with a partner, writing with an editor, going to book conferences where you can divide and conquer ways of brand building, and enjoying a book signing and the celebration after, with a friend.

Our journey demonstrates that, with determination, passion, and a supportive partnership, one can achieve

extraordinary feats. Our ability to balance full-time careers, family responsibilities, and our writing aspirations is a testament to trying to be better versions of ourselves. They were already in the field of betterment; Krista with life coaching military spouses and Nicole with helping women look better or find a home. But now they apply these principles to their combined brand where they balance seeking success with portraying the dark side of being too obsessed with perfection in their stories in hopes of empowering other people to seek harmony over being too driven.

If you decide to buddy up on pitching your next book, have been considering coauthoring, and are curious about leaning into the limitless possibilities that await you when you write with a companion, please reach out so we can add you to our list of other authors who we like to cheer on from the sidelines.




Since 2003, Dr. Krista Wells, Ph.D. has helped hundreds of individuals navigate career and life changes and create the life they've always wanted. Through one-on-one life

IF WE CAN DO COAUTHORING, YOU CAN TOO! *continued*

coaching, Zoom workshops, and public speaking, Krista has helped military spouses and individuals in transition get to where they want to be, faster. www.kristawells.com.

She is also a fiction co-author with Nicole Moleti at www.addisonmcknight.com ■



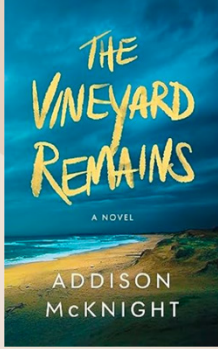
"An emotionally resonant debut that will stay with you long after you read the last word."—Liz Fenton and Lisa Steinke

"Edgy, relatable, and heartbreaking—this unflinching thriller will have you turning the pages as fast as you can... Addison McKnight's debut grabs the reader and doesn't let go until the gasp-worthy ending."—Hank Phillippi Ryan

"The emotion is visceral, the heartbreak and suspense are almost unbearable, and it all leads to a stunning ending. McKnight is a superb observer of domestic drama."—Luanne Rice

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March 12, 2024

FIRST AND LAST

The hardest parts



By Alexandra Youmans

I've read about 100,000 pieces of student writing in my 23-year career. This figure comes from sitting around, performing a perverse kind of math, multiplying the number of students I have each semester by the number of assignments I give them by the number of semesters I've been teaching. If I then multiple that figure by how much time it takes to write those comments, I start to have some very dark thoughts indeed.

That darkness grows exponentially when I feel that I am not having any effect, a feeling that seems to arise most often when it comes to teaching first and last sentences. Please, dear students, pay attention to what I'm telling you right now: I don't know who taught you this, but starting a paper with a rhetorical question

is not going to “grab the reader by the throat” like a good first sentence should. A first sentence has *one job*—to get people to read the second sentence. I know there are some writing teachers who would disagree with me, but I don't think the first sentence has to have anything to do with your main point. *It just has to be interesting. It just has to be sticky, like flypaper.*

Give me something gory, dramatic, visual, gripping, detailed. Look at the number that started this essay: 100,000. If that doesn't feel like a shocking number of assignments to read in a lifetime, I admire your capacity for huge workloads. You might consider becoming an English teacher.

Here are some other opening lines I love because they pull me into reading the whole piece:

FIRST AND LAST *continued*

*One sad, rainy morning last winter, I talked to a woman who was addicted to crack cocaine. She was twenty-two, stiletto-thin, with eyes as old as tombs. –Pete Hamill, “Crack in the Box”

*My first victim was a white woman. –Brent Staples, “Just Walk on By”

And here is my favorite opening paragraph, from an essay in *The Atlantic* called “Is Facebook Making Us Lonely?”

*Yvette Vickers, a former Playboy playmate and B-movie star, best known for her role in *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman*, would have been 83 last August, but nobody knows exactly how old she was when she died. According to the Los Angeles coroner’s report, she lay dead for the better part of a year before a neighbor and fellow actress, a woman named Susan Savage, noticed cobwebs and yellowing letters in her mailbox, reached through a broken window to unlock the door, and pushed her way through the piles of junk mail and mounds of clothing that barricaded the house. Upstairs, she found Vickers’s body, mummified, near a heater that was still running. Her computer was on too, its glow permeating the empty space. –Stephen Marche

Pete Hamill’s essay is about the addictive nature of television, Brent Staples’ essay is about racism, and the Facebook article is about the way social media engenders alienation. None of these openings

announces the topic of the piece. That’s not what you want to do at the very beginning. You just want to engage. Some people even call the first sentence the “hook,” suggesting that it has the capacity to reel readers into the essay.

Give me any word and I can connect it to any topic, like so:

Random word: Tractor

Random topic: Whether student-athletes should be paid

Opening lines:

*A handsome young man stretches off the seat of the tractor he is driving to reach for the hat he has hung on the branch of a tree. We, the audience of the 1991 film *The Man in the Moon*, never see the gore of his body being plowed under by the harrow’s blades when he falls off that tractor seat. But this terrible fate is clear when others announce his death to the two sisters who have been vying for his love and attention. When a young life is cut short like this, people pay attention, but we don’t always note the risks inherent in certain activities before tragedy occurs. In our time, more young men and women play college sports than drive tractors, but many of them face risks and tragic outcomes with no recompense. Because of what they put on the line in terms of effort, time, and yes, sometimes danger, they deserve to be paid.*

See? You can start anywhere as long as it’s not boring. Think of the goriest thing

FIRST AND LAST *continued*

that you've ever seen or experienced. Don't start with the morning of that event. Start with the crack of bone, the smell of singed skin, the screech of tires.

Gore not your thing? Think of your most precious memory and start with that. *Not with the whole day.* Just the heat rising off the pavement when you stepped out of the car at Disney World, or the ripple of the water as you plucked your first fish from the lake.



Last lines are also difficult. It is easy to say that you have to answer the question, "So what?" at the end of a piece of writing, as in, "Who cares about this? Why should it matter to anyone?" But it's much harder to execute a final sentence that has a "wow factor," as in, "Wow, I'm really thinking about something in a new way," or "Wow, I'm so glad I read that," or even just, "Wow." After I read a powerful ending, I pause, soaking it in. My friend Isabel Cowles Murphy recently wrote, "It reminds me of the rest composers put at the end of the last bar of music. That silence has a sound." I'm still thinking about that, weeks later.

Like anything (running, cooking, playing a musical instrument), knowing when and how to finish a piece of writing takes practice. You have to think about the Big Picture. What does your topic

represent in terms of universal human concerns like love, choice, change, identity, suffering? What's interesting to you—the events of your own life, for example—may not be as interesting to others, unless you connect them to something that we all face. For example, let's say you didn't get the guitar you wanted for Christmas last year. I'm not a musician. I know nothing about guitars. But I'm a human, and I know something about disappointment. Can you touch my heart by ruminating on the nature of disappointment at the end of your Christmas story? With practice, yes. Yes, you can.

Here is my pretend ending to my pretend essay about student-athletes.

I've been a teacher for most of my life—since I was 15! I know how much young people need to feel valued. Throwing student-athletes onto the field, the pitch, the track, or the court and asking them to face the emotional, mental, and physical risks simply for "the love of the game" is an inadequate way to show that they have value. When my dad taught at the University of Florida in the 1990s, he made a satisfactory salary, but it was a small percentage of what Steve Spurrier, the head football coach at the time, was making. The football program won six SEC titles under Spurrier's leadership, bringing in millions of dollars to the university. The football players were paid nothing. As an

FIRST AND LAST *continued*

older person, I see clearly now how much we need the young people who sit in my classroom and play on our athletic fields. And how much they need us to imbue them with confidence that they can change the world because that's what they must do. If we want them to save us, we have to show them that they are capable and that we are worth saving. That starts with basic fairness.

If this were the ending of my essay, I would take my title from that last line and make it something like

Basic Fairness: How We Should Treat Student-Athletes

in order to create a full-circle, or wraparound, ending.



Final notes:

1. Make your first sentence not boring. It doesn't have to be related

to your topic. “My uncle lost his right arm in a skateboarding accident” or “The leaves rippled like tiny orange and yellow flags in some cosmic tickertape parade” are going to grab more readers than something like, “Dogs are the best pets” or “As everyone knows, friendship is important.” In the middle part of your introduction, find a way to get from that **DRA-MATIC** or **VISUAL** first line to your claim, which will be the last sentence of your intro.

2. Start your conclusion by restating your claim. Then, in your last sentence, connect your claim to something universal, the Big Picture. Make people think, “Wow.”
3. Get your title from your last line and use a subtitle for more explanation about the essay's claim. ■





LITERARY AGENT SQUASHES BUDDING AUTHOR LIKE A BUG

By Dane Zeller

Novelist Releases Emails to Public

Date: May 1

From: Stella Pinkerton

To: Dane Zeller

Subject: Your Novel

I'm sorry, Mr. Zeller, but your novel does not fit our needs at this time. Good luck in finding a place for it.

Date: May 1

From: Dane Zeller

To: Stella Pinkerton

Subject: My Novel

I know you're very busy with many queries. I would very much appreciate a tiny clarification of your rejection. By "Good luck..." do you mean "Good luck, sir, this is a good novel. I hope you find a place for it," or, "Good luck, buddy, trying to find a place for this." ?

Date: May 15

From: Stella Pinkerton

To: Dane Zeller

Subject: Your Novel

Don't read anything into what I say.

Date: May 15

From: Dane Zeller

To: Stella Pinkerton

Subject: My Novel

Thank you for responding, Ms. Pinkerton. I can't help it, but I'm just trying to improve my novel, bit by bit. I know you're busy. That's why I'm not trying to build a conversation here. I'm just trying to understand exactly what your twenty-three-word rejection means. When you said "I'm sorry..." was that just boilerplate rejection rhetoric, or were you genuinely sad that you couldn't consider my novel?

LITERARY AGENT SQUASHES BUDDING AUTHOR LIKE A BUG! *continued*

Date: May 22
From: Stella Pinkerton
To: Dane Zeller
Subject: Your Novel

Yes.

Date: May 22
From: Dane Zeller
To: Stella Pinkerton
Subject: My Novel

Thank you for your response, Ms. Pinkerton. Was your “yes” referring to rhetoric or genuine sadness?

Date: May 29
From: Dane Zeller
To: Stella Pinkerton
Subject: My Novel

It’s been a week since I last heard from you. I hope I’m not bothering you. Just one last request, and I’ll respect your inbox. By “does not fit our needs at this time,” do you mean there might be a time in the future when it could...fit your needs?

Date: May 30
From: Stella Pinkerton
To: Dane Zeller
Subject: Your Careening Curiosity.

Zeller, when else might be a time, other than “in the future”? Could you just not use more words than you need? Like... how about zero?

Date: May 30
From: Dane Zeller
To: Stella Pinkerton
Subject: My Novel

Thank you, Stella. Ha ha, you’re right. It’s like people who say they’re planning for the future. What else could they plan for! One last thing. Do you guys actually read more than the first few lines of submitted first three chapters? Because, I don’t have a dead body until chapter three.

Date: May 30
From: Stella Pinkerton
To: Dane Zeller
Subject: Your not-novel Novel

You asked for it Zeller. This will be my last response to you. First, your protagonist is named “Milkey,” as in “milque-toast”. How better could you describe a

LITERARY AGENT SQUASHES BUDDING AUTHOR LIKE A BUG! *continued*

private eye as a wimp? He's got a spot of ketchup on his tie, and he doesn't care. He drives a Crown Victoria like he's trying to be a policeman. I'll bet it has spotlights and an antenna on it just like a security guard's car. One of his assistants at Donald Milkey and Associates, Private Investigators, is his girlfriend who has more guts than Donnie-boy. His other assistant, Garcia, has a grasp of the language that makes it hard for your readers to read. I would recommend that you don't have him greet women with the phrase, "How you hangin'?" In fact, the star of

your novel, if you check it, is a gun-toting homeless woman who is unfamiliar with the laws regarding the discharge of a weapon in the city. Donald Milkey is not a private eye, he is a fired security guard! Don't bother me anymore.

Date: May 30

From: Dane Zeller

To: Stella Pinkerton

Subject: My Novel

So... you read all three chapters. ■



MEET THE 2024 WILLIAM 'REV. BILL' MCDONALD SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

By Valerie Ormond

Congratulations to MWSA's 2024 scholarship winners, Brennan Kenville and Donovan Kirby. The first place winner received a \$1000 check, and both the winner and runner-up received winner frames and certificates and an MWSA challenge coin.

Brennan Kenville was MWSA's first place scholarship award winner for his essay entitled "That Patriotism Means to Me." Brennan is a junior at Basha High School in Chandler, AZ. MWSA Vice President Valerie Ormond was his sponsor, and had this to say about him.

"Brennan is an outstanding young man who is a leader in his school's Air Force Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (AFJROTC) unit. We were honored to host Brennan and his family for a tour of the United States Naval Academy, which he is considering attending, although we know his first choice is the United States Air Force Academy. During that tour, we discussed an upcoming family friend's

100th birthday celebration in Chandler, Arizona, which is where he lives. He volunteered to have his unit perform at this Navy WAVES' (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service) event, and it was the highlight of the night. It is so nice to see the spirit of volunteerism alive and well, and I hope Brennan is an inspiration to others."

Following is his essay:

There is a common motto in the military and its related organizations, *Non Sibi Sed Patriae*—Not for self but for country, and I believe that this phrase exemplifies the true meaning of patriotism. To me patriotism is not simply liking your country, but acting in ways that put the country's citizens' needs above one's own. In addition, true patriots are those who, through their actions, prioritize the people of their country instead of their own goals. But how is a patriotic action defined? I believe that the intent of the action is the distinguishing factor.

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When this intent involves helping the citizens of the country, directly or indirectly, the action is patriotic. Following this, the actions themselves can range wildly but all carry the common theme of serving the nation's citizens. From protecting them through the military, serving our country as a politician, or giving direct aid through humanitarian work.

Even though there is such a wide range of ways to be considered a patriot, I believe that two relatives of mine truly embody patriotism, in the manner that I define it and all its values. First, my great-grandfather Louis Lavitt was truly an American patriot and embodied all of its values. Even at a young age, he already incorporated service in his life when at 14 he left home and attended Stanton Military Academy and later Syracuse University. His formal military service began at the onset of WWII where, with some difficulty due to losing 3 fingers at a young age in an accident, he enlisted in the Army Air Corps. In the service, he wasn't eligible to fly combat missions due to his disability, so instead he trained pilots on one of the first flight simulators, the Link. Another duty of his was accompanying newly enlisted soldiers on trains heading to basic training. After the war, Louis retired as a Sergeant and although his military service was done, he continued to embody patriotic values though politics

and humanitarian work. On the political front, he and his wife worked hard to get people to vote and keep people informed for the sake of others. Throughout his life he served to indirectly help this nation's citizens, helping to protect them in the war and better the country through politics, but Louis also had a direct impact on the people. He and his wife were known to help put people through college, feed the needy, and generally be great citizens. His biggest contribution was the assistance in the creation of the International Myeloma Foundation that, to this day, helps to save thousands of lives of people living with multiple myeloma cancer. Louis was proud to be an American. In his later years, his granddaughter, Ilana, would ask him where he was from, meaning his genealogical roots. His reply every time—"I'm American."

The other person that I believe truly embodies patriotism is my grandfather, Robert Morra. Robert has always had a love for his country, and this love led him to enlist in the Army in 1962. During his stint in the Army, Robert was a member of the Artillery Corps, and was active through the Cuban Missile Crisis, President Kennedy's assassination, and the onset of the Vietnam War. In 1965, he enrolled in college and became a science teacher. This transition marks the shift towards Robert's long career in public

2024 WILLIAM 'REV. BILL' MCDONALD SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS! *continued*

service, and he continued this service in 1971 by becoming a part of the volunteer fire service in his town and through his service from then to the present, he has been the deputy chief for a large portion of that service. Robert's dedication to the country did not end there. In 1989, he was elected to the board of Selectman for his town of Bolton, CT. He continued to serve as a public servant and for 18 of his 33 years of service, he was elected first selectman, the equivalent of a mayor and police chief. To this day, he is on the Board of Selectmen and helps to prepare candidates for the First Selectman position. Throughout Robert's political career, he has never lost an election, and this speaks to the fact that he is a great leader and pillar of the community that always puts the people's needs first, and this is why I believe he is a true patriot. Throughout his life, Robert has always influenced and helped this nation's citizens, from direct protection in the Army, teaching the nation's youth, and serving the community both physically and politically. The constant dedication towards other citizens shown by Robert Morra distinguished him as a true patriot.

Although they lived very different lives, both of these great men served this nation's citizens to the best of their ability. From Louis Lavitt's service in the Air Corps to Robert Morra's service in local

office, the dedication to the citizens of the United States echoes through all their actions. And this dedication to their fellow citizens through action is the defining characteristic of a patriot. And that is what patriotism means to me—selflessly serving the people of this great country.

By Brennan Kenville



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Our first runner-up was Donovan Kirby.
[Input by Bob Doerr]

Donovan's essay answers the question "Why is public school better than private school?"

I have gone to both and while private school had better education, public school is a better place for me. Public school is best for me because of the people you get to meet, social skills development, real world preparedness, networking opportunities, community engagement, and cost of engagements.

In private school there was a small amount and a small demographic of people. While in high school there a lot more people and a bigger demographic. This has helped me learn how to interact with different types of people and learn about their culture and gave me the perspective on the real world.

The large number of people in public school helped me work on my social skills. While I was in private school, I was antisocial in large public settings, but since my public school is so big I've learned how to act and be comfortable in a public setting.

With learning these social skills I have also formed lifelong friendships and connections. The connections I have can also turn into multiple networking activities as public schools usually do have a better alumni network than private schools.

These networking opportunities can help me in the future while looking for jobs, internships, and mentorship.

Public school also offers more extra-curriculars than private school since they are government funded. Most private schools can't have sports like football since it's expensive to have a field and pads. Public schools usually provide a stronger but fair competition level as well as there is an excess amount of public schools compared to private schools.

Private school also provides a more sheltered experience than public school. Public school in contrast gives a more real world experience. With its larger student body and diversity it teaches us how to navigate through many different social situations that we might encounter in real life.

Public schools are also more tied to its surrounding community by doing lots of events, job fairs, college fairs, and partnerships with local businesses which help for networking opportunities. They also provide multiple events to give back through service and donations which helps with college and job applications. It's also good to give back in general.

Public school is also free while private school is expensive and has to be paid for. Public school provides a potentially better experience for free while providing free things like sports and lunches. Private

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school might provide a better education but since it’s expensive it is sheltered since usually it is mainly attended by wealthy people.

In conclusion, public school provides a better social experience while being an overall more efficient place to go. Public school better prepares its students for the real world and gives them more opportunities to expand their resume and join the workforce and/or go to college. Private schools do excel in having better education but for me I enjoy public school more because of the people I got to meet and the social skills I developed that private school could never give me.

By Donovan Kirby

Thank you to our Scholarship Chair, Rob Lofthouse for running an outstanding program, and thank you to our volunteer judges for their time and effort. ■

