

## Biblio File

**Marlene Targ Brill's** *Tooth Tales from around the World* was chosen for the new statewide program Illinois Reads, sponsored by the Illinois Reading Council and Illinois State Library. The program



**Marlene Targ Brill**

launched March 13 and runs through Family Reading Night in November. ... As Literary License was going to press, it was with a heavy heart we heard the sad news that SMA member and award winner **Roger Ebert** had died. ... **Dan**

**Dinello** wrote the chapter "Techno-Totalitarianism in Alien" for the just-published book *The Culture and Philosophy of Ridley Scott*. ... **Kathie Giorgio's** short story "Sear" has been accepted for publication in Clockhouse Review. ... **Jacquelyn Mitchard**, who's moved out east from Madison, Wis., has created a new imprint, Merit Press, aimed at teens, Publishers Weekly reported. In late December and early January, the imprint – named after one of Mitchard's daughters as well as for her aspirations for the quality of the writing – released its first five books. She also is working on two adult novels. ...

**Martha Miller's** most recent book, a 24th Lambda Award finalist, *Retirement Plan: A Crime Story*, in addition to paperback and e-book, is now out in audible. ... **Elizabeth Fama** reports, "I'm so happy that YALSA [Young Adult Library Services Organization] selected *Monstrous Beauty* for its 'Amazing Audiobooks for Young Adults 2013' list!" ... **Paul McComas** has co-authored a novella with Greg Starrett of



**Martha Miller**

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## Author, gun enthusiast says it's time to reform the laws

BY THOMAS FRISBIE

First off, Gerry Souter makes it clear that he is a gun lover.

Souter, author of *American Shooter: A Personal History of Gun Culture in the United States*, said at the March Society of Midland Authors program that his appreciation of the art of shooting began as he was young.

"I was not exactly the poster child for American boyhood," Souter told the audience March 12 at the Harold Washington Library in Chicago. "I had few skills. I hung out with a gang in the South Side of Chicago. In those days again, we weren't much of a gang really, we were a bunch of nervous white kids gathered together like a herd of wildebeests, and the people that we feared, the lions in the group, were mostly Catholic and Polish gangs [whose] the fathers all worked over at the steel mills."

His life as a nervous wildebeest started to change when he attended an invitation to join the Boy Scouts and saw "a little white [merit] badge with red concentric circles with a red dot in the middle" that he could earn by learning to shoot a gun.

"To have a real gun with a bullet in it, that was the height of cool," he said. "Lo and behold, for a kid who had no skills in any other sport, I found out I could [hit a target] pretty good every time with a little J. Stevens Single Shot .22."

Souter joined an American Legion shooting team and entered firing competitions.

"Our team was so good, they started putting us against military shooters at Fort Sheridan and the Great Lakes Naval

Training Station," he said. "And we won some medals. We set a couple of records."

But the risks of carrying weapons without proper training and preparation were made clear to him when he got a job as a security guard.

"I showed up at the door and the fellow I was relieving, he takes this paper bag out, rummages through it and pulls out a 1938 Enfield [revolver] that was used pre-World War II. ... I took the gun and the five bullets, put it together, put my holster ... over my shoulder and set out on my rounds."

It was a spooky place with machines clicking on and off, he said.

"You could smell the hot oil. You could see the dark shadows everywhere," Souter said. "All of a sudden a whole bunch of boxes tumble down at the end of the hallway that I'm stand-

ing in, a big dark empty space.

"I grabbed my pistol ... and made what could have been a beautiful fast draw if the front of the barrel hadn't hooked on the lip of the holster as I was pulling it out. The hinge came loose on the front. The barrel went spinning out into space. The cartridge cylinder fell of the gun. ... I'm standing there holding the handle and the hammer and an empty trigger guard.

"The last thing I remember of that particular scene was the rear end of that darned brindel cat."

The lesson, Souter said, is that people shouldn't think they can use guns in tense situations without a lot of training.

*The Society of Midland Authors' programs may be heard in their entirety at [www.chicagopublicradio.org/](http://www.chicagopublicradio.org/) amplified.*



**Gerry Souter**

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Munster, Ind., *Fit for a Frankenstein*. Also, he'll be reading from, discussing, and signing *Fit* at "Forties Film Night at Boswell Books" in tandem with Dave Lührssen, who'll be doing likewise for his own new biography *Mamouliau: Life on Stage and Screen*, on Tues. May 7, 7 p.m., Boswell Book Co., 2559 N. Downer Ave. in Milwaukee. Also, Paul presented his free 90-minute program "Scribe of Social Conscience: Steinbeck Plus Seventy-Five" on March 25 at Marquette University through its Center for Peacemaking. It was standing-room-only as 100 people packed the ballroom . . . "and got great media coverage," Paul reports. . . **John Green** reviewed *Eleanor & Park* in the March 10 New York Times Book Review . . . The April Chicago Magazine has an excerpt of SMA award winner **Aleksandar Hemon's** new book, *The Book of My Lives*. . . In April, **Gerry and Janet Souter** will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary. . . On the Atlantic website March 8, Ta-Nehisi

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## Literary License

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

# Sign up now for book awards dinner

Once a year, the Society of Midland Authors holds a special event to honor the best books by the region's authors. The prestigious literary prize has been a tradition since 1957, honoring authors from Saul Bellow and Gwendolyn Brooks to Jane Smiley and Roger Ebert.

The Society has announced our judges' choices for the best 2012 books by Midwest authors – and you can reserve a place now at our awards banquet. **An early registration form is on Page 7.**

The dinner will be Tuesday, May 14, at the Holiday Inn Chicago Mart Plaza, 350 N. Orleans St., Chicago, in the LaSalle Room, which features a lovely view of the city. A reception with cash bar begins at 6 p.m. followed by the dinner and awards ceremony at 7 p.m.

The master of ceremonies will be Steve Bertrand, morning anchor of WGN-AM radio and host of the video podcast "Steve Bertrand on Books," which features interviews with leading writers. For details, visit [www.facebook.com/stevebertrandonbooks](http://www.facebook.com/stevebertrandonbooks).

Many of the award-winning authors and finalists are likely to attend, giving short acceptance speeches. The banquet offers a great opportunity to meet members of the Society of Midland Authors and the distinguished writers we're honoring this year. And that's not all – free copies of many of the award-winning and finalist books will be available for banquet attendees to take home.

The cost to attend the banquet is \$75. Besides using the form on Page 7, you can make reservations online with a PayPal payment at: [http://midlandauthors.com/online\\_banquet\\_form.html](http://midlandauthors.com/online_banquet_form.html) (with a \$1 to help defray PayPal's processing fee).

You may also print out the reservation form at: [http://midlandauthors.com/dinner\\_reservation\\_form.html](http://midlandauthors.com/dinner_reservation_form.html)

and mail a check to us at the address listed there (Society of Midland Authors, P.O. Box 10419, Chicago, IL 60610).

### AWARD WINNERS

#### ADULT FICTION

(Two winners in this category.)  
WINNERS: Nick Dybek, *When Captain Flint Was Still A Good Man*, Riverhead. (Dybek, now living in New York, grew up in Chicago and graduated from the University of Michigan and the Iowa Writers' Workshop. Nick's father, Stuart Dybek, is a past

winner of the same award.)  
Jack Driscoll, *The World of a Few Minutes Ago*, Wayne State University Press. (Author was a writer-in-residence at Interlochen Arts Academy in Michigan for 33 years and now lives in Oregon.)  
FINALISTS: Peter Geye, *The Lighthouse Road*, Unbridled Books. (Author lives in Minneapolis.)  
Richard Babcock, *Are You Happy Now*, Amazon Publishing. (Author lives in Chicago.)

#### ADULT NONFICTION

WINNER: Neil Steinberg, *You Were Never in Chicago*, University of Chicago Press. (Author lives in Northbrook, Ill.)  
FINALISTS: Mark Binelli, *Detroit City Is the Place to Be: The Afterlife of an American Metropolis*, Metropolitan Books. (Author was raised in the Detroit area and now lives in New York.)  
Benjamin Busch, *Dust to Dust: A Memoir*, Ecco. (Author lives in Reed City, Mich.)  
Gregory Harms, *It's Not About Religion*, Perceval Press. (Author lives in Joliet, Ill.)

#### BIOGRAPHY

WINNER: David Von Drehle, *Rise to Greatness: Abraham Lincoln and America's Most Perilous Year*, Henry Holt and Co. (Author lives in Mission Hills, Kan.)  
FINALISTS: Steven Luby, *John Brown's Spy: The Adventurous Life and Tragic Confession of John E. Cook*, Yale University Press. (Author lives in the Chicago area.)  
Rich Cohen, *The Fish That Ate the Whale: The Life and Times of America's Banana King*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux. (Author grew up in Glencoe, Ill., and now lives in Ridgefield, Conn.)

#### CHILDREN'S FICTION

WINNER: Shelley Pearsall, *Jump Into the Sky*, Knopf Books for Young Readers. (Author lives in Silver Lake, Ohio.)  
FINALISTS: Polly Carlson-Voiles, *Summer of the Wolves*, Houghton Mifflin Books for Children. (Author lives in Ely, Minn.)  
Tim Shoemaker, *Code of Silence: Living a Lie Comes With a Price*, Zonderkidz. (Author lives in Rolling Meadows, Ill.)

#### CHILDREN'S NONFICTION

WINNER: Mary Losure, *The Fairy Ring: Or Elsie and Frances Fool the World* Candlewick. (Author lives St. Paul, Minn.)  
FINALISTS: Rebecca L. Johnson, *Zombie Makers: True Stories of Nature's Undead*, 21st Century. (Author lives in Sioux Falls, S.D.)  
Ann Bausum, *Marching to the Mountaintop: How Poverty, Labor Fights and Civil Rights Set the Stage for Martin Luther King Jr.'s Final Hours*, National Geographic Children's Books. (Author lives in Janesville, Wis.)

#### POETRY

WINNER: Dan Gerber, *Sailing Through Cassiopeia*, Copper Canyon Press. (Author was born and raised in western Michigan and now lives in Santa Ynez, Calif.)  
FINALISTS: Joe Wilkins, *Notes From the Journey Westward*, White Pine Press. (Author lives in Forest City, Iowa.)  
John Koethe, *ROTC Kills*, Harper Perennial. (Author lives in Milwaukee.)

#### JAMES FRIEND MEMORIAL AWARD FOR LITERARY CRITICISM

WINNER: Jonathan Messinger, former Time Out Chicago books editor.

# Award winner Edward Hirsch to present April poetry program

**E**dward Hirsch, poet, critic and president of the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, will speak at a Society of Midland Authors event on Tuesday, April 16, at the newly renovated Cliff Dwellers Club in Chicago.

Booklist senior editor **Donna Seaman** will introduce Hirsch.

A native of Chicago, Hirsch has published several books of poems since 1981, including 1986's *Wild Gratitude*, winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award.

His most recent book is *The Living Fire: New and Selected Poems*, published in 2011 by Alfred A. Knopf.

His prose books include the 1999 best-seller *How to Read a Poem and Fall in Love With Poetry* – which the poet Garrett Hongo called “the product of a lifetime of passionate reflection” and “a wonderful book for laureate and layman both” – and *Poet's Choice*, a 2007 collection of essay-letters from the Washington Post

“It takes a brave poet to follow Homer, Virgil, Dante and Milton into the abyss. Hirsch's poems (are) compassionate, reverential, sometimes relievingly ruthless.”

poet **Dana Goodyear**

Book World.

“It takes a brave poet to follow Homer, Virgil, Dante, and Milton into the abyss,” poet Dana Goodyear wrote about Hirsch in the Los Angeles Times Book Review. “Hirsch's poems (are) compassionate, reverential, sometimes relievingly ruthless.”

Hirsch, who has a doctorate in folklore, has received fellowships from the Guggenheim and MacArthur foundations and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Hirsch was born in Chicago in 1950 and educated both at Grinnell College and the

**April 16, 2013, program**

**Cliff Dwellers  
200 S. Michigan Avenue  
22nd floor**

**6 p.m. - Social Hour**

**7 p.m. - Program**

**Free - donations accepted**

University of Pennsylvania, where he received his Ph.D. in folklore.

His first collection of poems, *For the Sleepwalkers*, was published in 1981 and received the Lavan Younger Poets Award from the Academy of American Poets and the Delmore Schwartz Memorial Award from New York University.

He has published several other books of poems, including *Special Orders* (2008); *Lay Back the Darkness* (2003); *On Love* (1998); *Earthly Measures* (1994); and *The Night Parade* (1989).

He is also the author of the prose volumes *The Demon and the Angel: Searching for the Source of Artistic Inspiration* (Harcourt, 2002) and *Responsive Reading* (1999).

Hirsch also has received the Rome Prize from the American Academy in Rome, an Academy of Arts and Letters Award, and a Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Writers' Award.

He has been a professor of English at Wayne State University and the University of Houston. In 2008, he was elected a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets.

He is the editor of *Transforming Vision: Writers on Art* (1994) and of *Theodore Roethke's Selected Poems* (2005). He is also the co-editor of *A William Maxwell Portrait: Memories and Appreciations* (2004) and *The Making of a Sonnet: A Norton Anthology* (2008), and he edits the series *The Writer's World* (Trinity University Press).

He also has received the Prix de Rome and the American Academy of Arts and Letters Award for Literature.

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Coates called **Thomas Sugrue's** *Sweet Land of Liberty* “probably the definitive history of the civil rights movement in the North.” ... How many books have to sell to be an Amazon bestseller? Publishers Weekly on March 10 estimated about 300 copies per day across all channels, including other retailers, to make the top five. ... **Frances McNamara's** *Death at Woods Hole* is a finalist for ForeWord Reviews Book of the Year Award in the

mystery category. ... **Craig Sautter** taught “Ethics and Critical Thinking” classes at Miami Dade College for the seventh year this winter. For the 20th year, he and his wife, Sally, researched and nominated candidates for the annual McGraw Prize in



**Craig Sautter**

Education. Craig also recently was a judge for the Tigertail Wordspeak Poetry Slam, a poetry slam of students from five Miami High Schools sponsored by Tigertail Productions. ... Lawyers for the Creative Arts is staging a discussion on “The New Era of Publishing: What Authors and their Lawyers Must Know,” Wednesday, April 10, at Winston & Strawn, 35 W. Wacker, 5:30-7:30 p.m. ... Allium Press says a debut thriller by Tim Chapman, *Bright and Yellow, Hard and Cold* will be out June 1. ... **June Sawyers'**



**June Sawyers**

solo play “Life without Roses” about the life and work of Margaret Anderson, the unconventional editor of the seminal literary magazine, *The Little Review*, during the heady days of the Chicago literary renaissance of the early 20th century will be performed April 26, 2013, from 7.30 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the Anna Morgan Studio, Room 825, in the Fine Arts Building, 410 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago. \$10. A wine and cheese

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reception will be held immediately following the performance. ... **Wally Podrazik** was quoted March 20 in Medill Reports saying viewing shows such as "Homeland" makes people think they are getting a fuller picture of reality than what the government gives them. "The aftermath of 9/11 and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have been around for a while now. In a way this storytelling is this generation owning and dealing with this war," Wally was quoted as saying. "This is not already in the pages of the history book, this is now – this is them. There are many stories to tell. What does it all mean? If it's worth it, why is it worth it? If it isn't, why? There is a captivating draw." ... **Donald Ray Pollock** was scheduled April 4 to read at Coastal Carolina University. ... **Dominique Raccah** is among the featured speakers scheduled by the International Digital Publishing Forum for Digital Book 2013, May 29-30 in New York. ... **David Radavich** is the president of the Charlotte (S.C.) Writers Club. ... **Mahmoud Saeed** was interviewed March 19 on Chicago's WBEZ-FM. ... **Donna Seaman** reviewed *The Burgess Boys* by Elizabeth Strout for the April 2 Chicago Tribune.

## SMA Support

The Society of Midland Authors is trying to build up its Endowment Fund to help fund awards for the winners of our annual book competition and help promote literature in our 12 Midland states.

Thanks to these members for their recent contributions:

**Richard Bessette, Bernard J. Brommel, Edward Burke, Phyllis Choyke, Carol DeChant, Michael Ebner, Elizabeth Fama, Marianne Forrest, Edward Gordon, Jeffrey Gusfield, Eldon Ham, Justin Isherwood, Rick Kogan, Marietta Marcin, Beverly Offen, Dennis Nordin, Carolyn Splear Pratt, Harriette Gillem Robinet and Sue William Silverman.**

## New Books

### HOLD FAST

In **Blue Balliett's** new book (Scholastic), the mystery begins with a bizarre accident on a deserted, wintery street in Chicago. It includes an old Langston Hughes book on rhythms, the Chicago Public Library's huge downtown building, a family of four that find themselves in the midst of a spiraling nightmare, and the 2003 Antwerp Diamond Heist, the biggest in history.

The March 10 New York Times Book Review called *Hold Fast* Blue Balliett's "latest and most heart-rending novel."

### POETS ON TEACHING

*Poets on Teaching*, written and edited by **Bruce Guernsey** with a forward by **Ted Kooser** has 20 classroom-tested exercises written and used by some of America's best teachers and writers of poetry.



**Bruce Guernsey**

The book is meant for the student and teacher alike. It is also meant for those who have never been in a poetry writing class but have, perhaps, been writing on their own or have been wanting to.

### CROSSING THE SKYWAY

**Barbara Gregorich** published her first poem when she was 11 years old. After that, she wrote longer works: novels, non-fiction books, activity books, supplementary textbooks — pretty much anything that required 20,000 words or more to tell. Then, decades later, the appeal of the pithy, the trenchant, and the intense lured her back to poetry. She has just published *Crossing the Skyway*, her first collection of poetry. The poems, most of them free

verse, all of them accessible, examine nature, the family, and the decay of capitalism.

### SKYSCRAPER FACADES OF THE GILDED AGE

Architectural historian, **Joseph J. Korom's** newest book (see Q&A on Page 7) is *Skyscraper Facades of the Gilded Age: Fifty-One Extravagant Designs, 1875-1910* (McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers).

The book questions the validity of Greek and Roman mythologies' relationships to "modern" America and its spirit of invention and progress. Foreign traditions were challenged by some architects but then accepted by most. Why was it necessary for the long-dead hero of a far-away civilization to be included on the façade of a newly invented American skyscraper?

This book, the result of some four years of research, writing and photography, tells why.

### DATELINE: ATLANTIS

**Lynn Voedisch's** next novel, *Dateline: Atlantis*, was due to come out on April 2, published by Fiction Studio Books, available as paperback or e-book.

The fantasy novel features a female Indiana Jones-like reporter who dives beneath the Mexican waves off the Yucatan Peninsula and finds what she thinks may be pyramids from a long-forgotten age. She and her photographer bring the news back to her Los Angeles newspaper.



**Lynn Voedisch**

The editor figures they are hot on the trail of a Pulitzer Prize. But then the photos, and the photographer, go missing and a continent-hopping adventure, complete with a cold murder case and a hot romance, begins.

# Authors give some cautionary advice

It isn't easy to get published. And even if you succeed at getting a book into print, don't expect overnight money, fame and recognition – not unless you're willing to devote years of hard work to being an author.

That's some of the cautionary advice from five authors who spoke March 2 in a panel discussion called "How to Get Published," which the Society of Midland Authors presented during the Creative Chicago Expo at the Chicago Cultural Center. But the talk, moderated by SMA President Robert Loerzel, wasn't simply one long session of moaning about the woes of publishing. The panelists also offered some hope to aspiring authors. Here are a few excerpts from their comments.

**Libby Fischer Hellman:** "I've done it all. I've had an agent. I've been with a large press. I've been with a smaller, medium-sized press. I've been with a tiny press. And I've self-published. I was in a very lucky position, where I kept the rights to most of my books for e-books. I've been published since 2002. I'm finally for the first

*Literary  
Legwork*  
**Robert  
Loerzel**

anyone else.

"I work with a colleague, **Michael Williams**, and we actually do everything from ideas to layout to writing to design to copy editing to distribution. We are our own mail center. We do a book a year and they've been pretty successful. We choose subjects that we think are really important and very interesting. ... I'm a big fan of what they used to call self-publishing. I call it publishing. It's like a musician who decides he's not going to let Warner Bros. take half of his profits."

Nick Disabato spoke about using Kickstarter to raise the funds for publishing his book on interactive design, *Cadence & Slang*. "If *Cadence & Slang* hadn't raised enough money ... it might not have been a good idea in the first place," he said. "Right now, Kickstarter is a popular enough crowd-funding platform



that even by being on there, I think you have a tremendous amount of visibility and connections with people and there's a certain kind of cool factor about it.

"My first book was not Harry Potter-level

successful, but I connected with everybody I sent a copy to. I know who they are. I packed the envelope myself. I grew my community very slowly. You're able to maintain relationships now, especially with the Internet, in a way that you weren't previously able to do."

People in at least 50 countries ordered copies of Disabato's book. "I've done everywhere in Europe except Bosnia," he said. "It's still really amazing to think that there's a copy of my book in Estonia. Even if you're not having gigantic successful reach, being able to connect with people in a meaningful way is something that you can hold onto for your first five books while you're toiling in obscurity."

**Richard C. Lindberg:** "I've been at this a long time. I'm what you call a regional writer, and that is both a blessing and a curse. Once you are tabbed as a regional writer, generally that's how New York will see you when you approach them with book projects, especially when it has something to do with Chicago.

“Agents are struggling to stay in business. ... They say they work for you. Really, they work for publishers. Their function is to be the gatekeeper between you and the publisher.”

They'll say, 'Well, why don't you get a Chicago publisher?' ... The first lesson I learned in this business was: Write about what you know. And I know the city of Chicago. The other piece of advice I'd offer is: Never give up your day job. Seriously. Because unless you're an A-list, New York Times best-selling author, chances are you have to be involved in something else or starve. Every one of my books has accompanied a full-time job.

"Midsize presses are disappearing. They're being squeezed out. I have published extensively in recent years with university presses. If you have a worthy nonfiction subject and it can be defended in peer review with experts in the field, you will likely get published. The downside is you probably won't find your book in Barnes & Noble - maybe one copy. When you see those New York titles by the cash registers and prominently displayed in the little, single kiosk, publishers are paying for that."

"Your first book is not going to get you on Oprah, it's not going to make you famous and it's not going to make you rich. ... It takes a body of work. It takes five to 10 books, really, before you get recognized."

"I'm not embracing electronic publishing. I still like to see a publisher take my book on merit and publish it. So maybe that makes me a Luddite or a snob or whatever, but I still prefer the traditional route of publishing."

**Gerry Souter** talked about writing books for book packagers: "Essentially you're the hired gun. Book packagers are the mercenaries, really, of the publishing world. They're a walking Rolodex of writ-

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## ■ Advice

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ers, layout artists, illustrators. Publishers find a hole in their nonfiction list. They go to the book packager. The book packager spins the little magic Rolodex and picks the authors."

Souter said he lucked into the world of writing packaged books when someone liked his work making a video and asked him to write a book about fire stations. More projects came to Souter and his wife, **Janet**, thanks to their membership in the American Society of Journalists and Authors.

"Once you finish with the book and it's out there, you walk away, because you've been paid one flat fee to do the book. Now, it can be several thousand dollars, but that's it. And then you move on to the next. ... Once you get into it, it's a tremendous economic engine that can drive your career."

**Hellman:** "The first thing you need to keep in mind is: Why are you writing? Are you writing just because you want to have a book with your name on it that you can show to family and friends and say, 'Look what I did?' Or are you writing because you can't not write? I think you have to discover what it is – are you a storyteller? Are you a poet? Are you a memoirist? Are you a historian? I think you really have to examine the reasons why you're writing books."

**Cahan:** "So you're sitting there listening to all this and you're going, 'Why am I here? It takes 11 years to make your first dime, and you publish 16 books and you still can't find a publisher.' I think the reason we're all here is that books are really special. They are our minds. When we hand a book to somebody, they can understand what we've been thinking for the last year or five years or all of our lives. (Books) still have a remarkably important place in our lives. ... And when people come up to me and say, 'Thank you for writing that book' – that's why we're all in this business."

You can hear the whole discussion on a recording by the city's Chicago Artists Resource website. The audio is posted on the SMA's blog at

<http://midlandauthors.com/blog/?p=147>

# My vivid memories of two legendary Midland authors

**W**hen Literary License Editor Thomas Frisbie learned I've been a member of the Society since 1981, he asked if I'd write about my memories "of that era."

I said yes but had misgivings. To be truthful, I remember the Society meetings of the '80s as a blur: successful authors all with multiple books under their belts. What was I, with one book, doing there, anyway?

Vivid memories of two extraordinary Society members will explain why. Early in my career (1964), I did freelance copywriting for a catalog. The money was good if I could just get paid. Tongue-in-cheek, I wrote to Herman Kogan, brusque, delightful and brilliant founding editor of the acclaimed Chicago

Daily News arts magazine *Panorama*, and asked, on behalf of all writers: "To dun or not to dun. That's the question." He ran the letter in his weekly column and merrily riffed on a subject dear to his heart. He also invited me to write something for *Panorama*.

I sent him many manuscripts, all returned with his unmistakable scrawl at the top. Not quite there. Not yet. Keep trying. Keep trying! Until one day, the incomparable Shirlee Desanti, Herman Kogan's right hand, called to tell me I had finally made it into *Panorama*. Would I like to pick up a proof sheet?

I raced downtown and when home, got a good look at the piece. I was crushed. My name was spelled wrong. I called Shirlee. She told her boss. In the background I heard a shouted obscenity. On publication, my name was spelled correctly, as it was on all subsequent pieces of mine that made it into *Panorama*.

Fast forward to 1981. My husband, George, and I were invited by friends to dinner with their friends, Lila and Arthur Weinberg. The Weinbergs had just come out with their sixth book, *Clarence Darrow, A Sentimental Rebel*. George and I had just come out with our first book, *Uncommon Women*, interviews with, and

rare photographs of, nine iconic American artists.

Introducing us, our hostess said she knew we'd all get along because "you are all writers." I wanted to sink through the floor. But I needn't have worried. That evening was the beginning of a beautiful friendship with the Weinbergs (both of whom served terms as SMA president).

Great, bearded, curly-haired Arthur, hilarious, curious, incisive, opinionated, told us how the first book, *Clarence Darrow: Attorney for the Damned* (1957), came to be published. He showed the manuscript to a friend, who showed it to his friend at Simon & Schuster. The rest – including 19 weeks as a New York Times bestseller – was history.

Softspoken Lila, bestower of the sweetest smile we'd ever been the recipients of, then proceeded to question us about our book. How did I get interviews with Mary McCarthy? Gwendolyn Brooks? Julie Harris? Sarah

Caldwell? And how did George manage to photograph these notoriously camera-shy legends? Truthfully, it wasn't as hard to have the artists commit as it was to nail down times to interview them within the contract's deadline. (I typed the last page and we hand-delivered the finished manuscript the day it was due.)

When I sent the Weinbergs a copy of the book, Lila called within days and declared it "wonderful." I must join the Society of Midland Authors. She'd sponsor me. I did, and she did. Until her death in 2010, we remained close friends. In fact, Lila was the earliest proponent – and reader – of George's newly published autobiography, *Lucky George*.

These, then, are the memories I hold close: two legendary Midland authors: one who encouraged me to write in the first place and the second who propelled me into the Society.

Are there greater gifts one writer can give another?

Literary  
Lore

Joan  
Kufrin



# Getting to the bottom of towering buildings

**J**oey Korom has written a new book about skyscrapers. Here's what he tells Literary License about his most recent work.

**Literary License:** *Why did you decide to focus on facades and the Gilded Age in your new book, Skyscraper Facades of the Gilded Age: Fifty-One Extravagant Designs, 1875-1910?*

**Joey Korom:** My last book, *The American Skyscraper 1850-1940: A Celebration of Height* (Branden Books, Boston, 2008), addressed a host of issues dealing with every aspect and early period of the skyscraper. With this new book, I decided to focus on the Gilded Age's preoccupation with decorating a building's façade with historical (temple, castle and palace) motifs rather than exploring modernism as it was known then.

**Literary License:** *What influence did Greek and Roman mythologies have on Gilded Age architecture?*

**Joey Korom:** The characters of Greek and Roman mythologies were included in sculptural form on the facades of many of the more prominent buildings designed during the Gilded Age. European mythology influenced – by habit, expectation, and propriety – contemporary designers; this prevailing influence stymied the search for more contemporary and/or American-based designs – those celebrating the birth of a new nation with a multitude of new inventions.

## Literary Landscape

Joey Korom



**Literary License:** *This book took four years to research. What surprises did you turn up along the way?*

**Joey Korom:** There were no surprises. I knew what I would find.

**Literary License:** *How did you define a design as "extravagant"?*

**Joey Korom:** Those chosen arguably represent the most flamboyant examples of the skyscraper art, those with fanciful towers or prominent domes, and those

“ *With this new book, I decided to focus on the Gilded Age's preoccupation with decorating a building's façade with historical (temple, castle, and palace) motifs rather than exploring modernism as it was known then.* ”

sporting facades that studiously borrowed from the architecture of Europe and that continent's history. And perhaps most importantly, inherent in this definition of "extravagant" is the representation of classical mythology on the walls of America's tall business buildings. Candidate buildings were also those that displayed their sponsor's wealth on a grand and pompous scale.

**Literary License:** *What's your next book?*

**Joey Korom:** For now, that's a secret. I will say that I am working on a project that is all Chicago.

## Society of Midland Authors

### Annual Dinner Early Registration Form

The Society of Midland Authors 57th annual awards banquet will be held May 14 in the LaSalle Room at the Holiday Inn Chicago Mart Plaza, 350 N. Orleans, Chicago, honoring the best books by Midwest authors published in 2012. The reception with a cash bar will start at 6 p.m. Dinner will begin at 7 p.m.

The master of ceremonies will be Steve Bertrand, morning anchor of WGN-AM radio and host of the video podcast "Steve Bertrand on Books," which features his interviews with leading writers.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

No. of parmesan crusted chicken breast dinners at \$75 each \_\_\_\_\_

No. of whole wheat fettuccine (vegetarian) dinners at \$75 each. \_\_\_\_\_

Please clip above form and mail to: Dinner Reservation, Society of Midland Authors, P.O. Box 10419, Chicago IL 60610  
You may also download a similar form at our website, [www.midlandauthors.com](http://www.midlandauthors.com)

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## New Members

**Dan Burns** is author of *The First 60 Seconds* (Sourcebooks, 2009) and *Recalled to Life* (Eckhardz Press).

Before embarking on his writing career, Dan served as owner and executive vice president of a national technical and management consulting company.

He received a Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Information Systems from DeVry University and a M.B.A. degree from DePaul University. He is a member of the faculty at DePaul University.

**Christine Sneed** is author of *Portraits of a Few of the People I've Made Cry* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2010) and *Little Known Facts* (Bloomberg USA, 2013)

She is a graduate of the MFA creative writing program at Indiana University and has published stories in *Best American Short Stories*, *PEN/O. Henry Prize Stories*, *New England Review*, *The Southern Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Pleiades*, *Glimmer Train*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Meridian*, *Other Voices*, *Greensboro Review*, *River Styx*, *Phoebe*, *South Dakota Review*, and many other journals.

**Cyndee Schaffer** is author of *Mollie's War* (McFarland Publishers, 2010) and editor of the monthly *Midwest Writers Association* newsletter. She received a BS in math education from Northwestern University and a MS in curriculum development from DePaul University.

She has been a high school mathematics teacher in Chicago and co-wrote and edited several mathematics textbooks for McDougal Littell Publishers and Quantum Scientific Publishing.

She also wrote training materials, conducted corporate training and tested computer systems for the City Colleges of Chicago and others.

*Mollie's War*, based on letters that Cyndee's mother sent home to her family while serving as a WAC stationed in Europe during WWII, won third place in the 2011 Stars and Flag book award contest and was a finalist in the 2011 Chicago Writers Association Book of the Year contest.

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## Final Chapters

### *David Hernandez 1946-2013*

**D**avid Hernandez, the "unofficial poet laureate of Chicago" and a former board member of the Society Midland Authors, told *Literary License* in a 2009 interview that, "I began writing poetry 53 years ago at the age of 11, and I never stopped."

Mr. Hernandez died of a suspected heart attack in February at his loft in Chicago's Logan Square neighborhood at age 66.

Mr. Hernandez drew inspiration from a city's quietly diligent people – a father working four jobs to make ends meet, a homeless man rooting through Dumpsters for cans, the *Chicago Sun-Times* said.

"Sure, he talked about Puerto Ricans and about people of color," SMA member **Achy Obejas** told the *Sun-Times*. "But mostly, he talked about working people, regardless of color. He talked about the beauty of ordinary people, which is why ordinary people loved him."

SMA member **Rick Kogan** wrote in the *Chicago Tribune*, "He knew our streets, the alleys and classrooms too; our nightclubs and libraries and the halls of power. He once appeared before more than 1 million people in Grant Park, reading a poem of his commissioned in honor of Chicago's sesquicentennial. But he could be found more frequently in public school or in such places as the Joliet Correctional Center, giving poetry workshops to kids or convicts."

Poet **Kevin Coval**, who has read at SMA programs, told the *Tribune*, "A great poet and terrific teacher, David was generous on every level. He was a profound influence on my life and career."

In the 2009 interview, Mr. Hernandez told *Literary License*, "Some of my favorite poems are about this neon lady I grew up with called Chicago and the people who live here. Sometimes, I would lock myself up so I could write more introspective poems, but I got bored with myself. I found out that deep down inside, I'm really superficial and I need the people, signs and sounds in order to create."

While he wasn't the first to find color in the commonplace, Mr. Hernandez did it with an infectious humor and a love that was all his own. And he did it with a musical accompaniment — "Street Sounds," a performance ensemble he founded in 1971, the *Sun-Times* said.

"I always felt that if you didn't see David on stage, you weren't getting the full experience," Obejas told the *Sun-Times*. "There was something about his rapport and his relationship with the people in the audience."

Mr. Hernandez was born in 1946 in Cidra, a small city in Puerto Rico. His family came to Chicago during the Puerto Rican migration in the mid-1950s. His father made candy bars at the Baby Ruth factory, and his mother cleaned bedpans at Chicago hospitals, the *Sun-Times* said.

Mr. Hernandez had joked to many audiences through the years that he chose poetry when his fifth-grade teacher told him poets "don't have to worry about commas, grammar and spelling. I said, 'Bingo! I'm a poet!'" the newspaper said.

"There's always been an extremely vital poetry scene in Chicago," said Mr. Hernandez in the 2009 interview with *Literary License*. "This city is a neon lady that nurtures quiet or introspective, loud and brassy poets."

For the last 10 years, Mr. Hernandez nurtured his own poetry behind an expansive bamboo-topped desk in a Logan Square loft with a view of an alley. The backs of other people's houses, Dumpsters and the people who frequented that space provided the perfect inspiration for his work, his wife, Batya Hernandez, told the *Sun-Times*.

"He loved city alley views," she said. "He was all about Chicago, and the little spots of Chicago."

Not long before he died, Mr. Hernandez completed his memoirs — a project he'd been working on for about a year, his wife said.

"That's something that hopefully will see the light of day – posthumously," Batya Hernandez told the *Sun-Times*. "It was almost like he did know [he was going to die]. He was so driven to finish."



**David Hernandez**