



Literary License

June, 2007

SMA AWARDS DINNER MAKES NEWS MORE THAN USUAL

BY RICHARD FRISBIE

Although the SMA annual dinner has frequently attracted print media attention over the years, our May 8 dinner at the Chicago Athletic Association made TV news for the first time. Chicago's Channel 7 (ABC) broadcast the awarding of this year's nonfiction prize to Roger Ebert for his book, *Awake in the Dark: the Best of Roger Ebert*, chosen from among 120 entries.

It was one of several poignant moments during the evening. Ebert, recently released after eight months in the hospital, came forward to receive his award amid long-lasting applause. He was unable to speak because of his throat condition, but his wife, Chaz, read a statement he wrote in advance, thanking his editors over the years, the University of Chicago Press and the Society.

"We are thrilled," she said. The Eberts postponed a trip to Florida to attend the dinner.

While in the hospital, Ebert read a lot. "Books, books, books," she said. Of course, as would be expected for a distinguished film critic, "he watched some movies too."

Sheila Leary, acting director of the University of Wisconsin Press, came from Madison, Wis., to tell the story behind *Sherwood Anderson: a Writer in America*, which won the biography prize posthumously for Walter B. Rideout.

She said he began researching Anderson's life in the 1940s and received a book contract in the 1950s. As a generation passed and the text grew to 2,300 pages, a new editor

cancelled the contract. Rideout fell victim to Alzheimer's disease and was unable to continue.

But UWP believed in the book and arranged with other Anderson scholars (one of whom also died during the work) to see it through publication in two volumes. So, receiving the award was an exciting moment for UWP press as well as Rideout's 88-year-old widow, who was unable to attend.

The winner of the adult fiction award, Samrat Upadhyay, drew a laugh from the audience of authors when he said that while growing up in Katmandu he thought that if he ever got a first book published everything would be "hunky-dory." It turned out not to be the case. *Royal Ghosts* is his third book, and he still struggles working on a new novel. "I feel like crying some mornings."

Kathleen Ernst, winner of the children's award for *Hearts of Stone* and author of a dozen other books, said she worked on it for eight years, on and off, after attending a Civil War re-enactment in Tennessee on "a cold, rainy day." She learned about thousands of refugees in the South displaced by the fighting, including

many children. She tried to "imagine what it must have been like" through a fictional family, led by a teenager, trying to find safety without parents to help.

Dennis Brindell Fradin, co-author with his wife of the children's nonfiction winner, reported that in going through the papers of Jane Addams at Northwestern University he came across a letter in which the SMA president at the time was reminding the Nobel prize-winning founder of Hull House that she was late in paying her dues as an SMA member.

Judith Bloom Fradin remarked that 30 years ago, while taking a course in Chicago literature, she had read a lot about the early days of the Society of Midland Authors. "I never expected to be in the room with you," she said.

(While the Fradins were speaking, their daughter-in-law was in labor, giving birth to their new grandson, Benjamin Batey Fradin.)

Jack Ridl, one of two winners in poetry, claimed he became a poet "so people would leave me alone." He read two of his short poems, including "History of the Pencil," inspired by his mother's habit of always writing him letters in pencil on whatever paper she happened to have at hand. He said she was a "leadite."

A special Distinguished Service Award was given to Mary Claire Hersh for work as the SMA webmaster who has given SMA a web site that would be the envy of a much larger organization. SMA President Thomas Frisbie, exaggerating only slightly, said he was amazed that if new information needed to be posted at 2 a.m. it "would turn up on the web

NEW EDITOR

This is the last issue of *Literary License* to be edited by Richard Frisbie. Effective immediately, all news should be sent to the new editor, Thomas Frisbie, 12 S. Owen, Mt. Prospect, IL 60056. E-mail: tomfrisbie@aol.com.

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at 2:01. I don't know how she does it."

Among the finalists, Timothy J. Gilfoyle scored a first by taking home plaques in two categories: adult nonfiction, for a book about Chicago's Millennium Park sponsored by Mr. and Mrs. Newton Minow, and biography, for a book about a pickpocket in 19th century New York.

Reporting on his book, *Guantanamo and the Abuse of Presidential Power*, Joseph Margulies said his publisher hoped his next book would be "less depressing."

With quick-witted Paul Green from Roosevelt University keeping things moving as master of ceremonies, the evening wound up just past 9:30 p.m.—notable because the SMA archives contain more than a few references to past dinners when speeches ran past what some considered bedtime.

AWARD WINNERS

Adult Fiction. Samrat Upadhyay, *Royal Ghosts*, Mariner Books.

Adult Nonfiction. Roger Ebert, *Awake in the Dark: The Best of Roger Ebert*, University of Chicago Press.

Biography. Walter B. Rideout, *Sherwood Anderson: A Writer in America*, University of Wisconsin Press.

Children's Fiction. Kathleen Ernst, *Hearts of Stone*, Dutton Juvenile.

Children's Nonfiction. Judith

Bloom Fradin and Dennis Brindell Fradin, *Jane Addams: Champion of Democracy*, Clarion Books.

Poetry (tie). Jack Ridl, *Broken Symmetry*, Wayne State University Press; Jeff Worley, *Happy Hour at the Two Keys Tavern: Poems*, Mid-List Press.

Distinguished Service Award. Mary Claire Hersh, SMA webmaster.

FINALISTS

Adult Fiction. Jane Hamilton, *When Madeline was Young: a Novel*, Doubleday; David Treuer, *The Translation of Dr Apelles: a Love Story*, Graywolf Press; Sam Savage, *Firmin, Adventures of a Metropolitan Lowlife*, Coffee House Press.

Adult Nonfiction. Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *Millennium Park: Creating a Chicago Landmark*, University of Chicago Press; Joseph Margulies, *Guantanamo and the Abuse of Presidential Power*, Simon and Schuster; Debra Marquart, *The Horizontal World: Growing Up Wild in the Middle of Nowhere*, Counterpoint; Scott Russell Sanders, *A Private History of Awe*, North Point Press.

Biography. Joan E. Cashin, *First Lady of the Confederacy: Varina Davis's Civil War*, Belknap Press; Timothy P. Gilfoyle, *A Pickpocket's Tale: The Underworld of Nineteenth-Century New York*, W. W. Norton; John F. Wasik, *The Merchant of Power: Sam Insull, Thomas Edison, and the Creation of the Modern Metropolis*, Palgrave Macmillan.

Children's Fiction. Roderick Townley, *The Constellation of Sylvie*, Atheneum; Pete Hautman, *Rash*, Simon and Schuster Children's Publishing; Sharon M. Draper, *Copper Sun*, Atheneum.

PUBLICITY TIP: REMEMBER THE AUDIENCES

BY TOM CIESIELKA

TC PUBLIC RELATIONS

When you offer a story to the media, you must keep three target

audiences in mind: the media outlet, the audience of that outlet and yourself.

The term, "free publicity," may sound perfect to you. The media outlet, on the other hand, cares more about the interest or relevance of the story. They will not respond well if you ask them for some "free publicity." A good pitch address the three audiences in specific ways:

The media outlet: The reporter or producer will be interested in the timeliness of your information, the credibility of what you offer and how clearly the story idea is presented. Be sure to offer several options on how you can help, and give several ways to contact you if they need more.

The end-user: Whether the end user is someone reading a newspaper, flipping through a magazine or watching a television news program, his or her needs are very important. So take the time to think about how your information will help or give valuable information to those who might be interested in your book.

You: Good media coverage helps your book in two ways: it gives you valuable exposure and establishes your expertise to the media. Make sure that the information you offer the media shows why your book is the best choice on the topic and connects with your central message.

The challenge of publicity is balancing the needs of your three target audiences to meet all of their needs. If you keep these targets in mind, you will be able to create effective publicity to grow your business.

SMA WEB SITE PULLS VISITS

The SMA web site, managed by Mary Claire Hersh, has been visited 81,430 times during the 12 months ending May 31.

This is an important statistic for members who have posted links to their personal web sites or news of their new books or public appearances.

Daily visits have averaged from 195 to 258. The busiest month was October, with 8,262 visits.

OTHER MEMBER NEWS

Literary “Movers and Shakers”

Reviewing the Chicago literary scene, *Newcity* magazine recently published a list of the top 50 “often behind-the-shelves movers and shakers who keep the books in the stores and in our minds.”

Included, along with Oprah Winfrey, were Thomas Frisbie (passing the torch as SMA president to James L. Mariner) and these SMA members: Roger Ebert, Joe Meno, Christian Wiman, Cheryl Reed, Garry Wills, Jessa Crispin, Donna Seaman, Aleksandar Hemon, Haki Madhubuti, Ivan R. Dee and S.L. Wisenberg.

Merchant Marine Honored

As part of the observance of Memorial Day, the *Chicago Sun-Times* called attention to the World War II service of Merchant Marine crewmen like Bruce Felknor, who was a radio officer.

Felknor has said that the merchant seamen never got as much respect as they deserved, although their casualty rate was exceeded only by that of the Marines.

Seamen “died from torpedoes, aerial bombs, shell bursts, frigid seas, flames, exploding cargoes...from drowning, trapped below decks...from starving, adrift in oar-less lifeboats.”

Felknor, who after the war became executive editor of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, told their story in his book, *The U. S. Merchant Marine at War, 1775-1945*.

George Washington for Kids

Brandon Marie Miller announces the publication of her new history title for young people, *George Washington for Kids, His Life and Times* from Chicago Review Press. The biography

also contains 21 activities based on Washington's life that Brandon designed and tested. More good news-- her last book, *Declaring Independence, Life During the American Revolution* (Lerner) was named a 2006 New York Public Library Book for the Teen Age and a Bank Street College Children's Book Committee Best Children's Book of the Year.

Market Not Tired of “Sleepy” Book

Jane Howard's picture book, *When I'm Sleepy*, was recently featured at a celebration of Earth Day at the Salato Wildlife Education Center in Frankfort, Ky., under the auspices of the Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources. Now in print for its 22nd year, the book has been translated into eight languages and was a Book-of-the-Month Club selection.

Inside Public Defender's Office

"Pick it up. You won't be able to put it down." That recommendation for Kevin Davis' new book, *Defending the Damned: Inside Chicago's Cook County Public Defender's Office*, came from the *Chicago Tribune Magazine* last month, just days after the book was released from Atria/Simon & Schuster.

Publishers Weekly called it "skillfully crafted" and *Time Out Chicago* described Davis' book as "intimate and gripping."

Rick Kogan, writer, author and host of WGN Radio's "Sunday Papers" program had this to say: "*Defending the Damned* is one of the most compelling books I have read in memory... It's an astonishing book."

Defending the Damned goes behind the scenes with a group of battle-hardened lawyers fighting for those accused of the ultimate crime: murder.

Davis spent five years watching and interviewing public defenders at the infamous Criminal Courts

Building at 26th and California on the city's southwest side. The result is an inside look at a dark corner of the criminal justice system as never seen before.

Bashing Bullying

Mary Elizabeth Anderson's *Gracie Gannon: Middle School Zero* targets the subject of bullying. The novel was due for release June 1 from Cloonfad Press. This is her fifth book for children. She has also written *Link Across America: A Story of the Historic Lincoln Highway*, *Ever Wonder What to Do: All About Manners*, *Taking Cerebral Palsy to School*, and *It's Me Again, God*.

Marilyn Moore Ph.D., Assistant Superintendent of Instruction for Lincoln, Nebraska, Public Schools says: "Gracie Gannon is a character every middle school student, teacher and parent will recognize, and so is her life. The wonder and muddle of early adolescence plays out in this story, with moments that are funny, tender, touching and prickly."

Bi-lingual Reading on Park Avenue

Achy Obejas traveled to New York at the end of April for a special bilingual reading with Jose Kozer, “an all-Cuban-Jewish event,” she said, at the Americas Society on Park Avenue. Kozer is a poet and educator. Obejas is author of *Days Of Awe*, Ballantine/Random House, 2001; *Memory Mambo*, Cleis, 1996, and *We Came All the Way From Cuba So You Could Dress Like This?*, Cleis, 1994.

New Book, New Place

Sue Sussman writes: “I have just sold my place in Chicago and am (now) a full time Florida resident. So, why do I still consider my trips to Chicago 'going home'?”

“There is an active writing community here. I taught a Writer's Workshop at FIU's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute and was on a couple of panels in last week's Sleuthfest – the mystery writer's

group here. I've just published *The Secret of the Mask* (children's mystery) with Whitman and am beginning to crank up my writing now that I'm moved in and (relatively) organized..

"Please give my best to everyone. ... And, if you're ever down this way, please do call and we'll all go out and toast the sea."

Story of Stories Makes Big Story

At a time when many newspapers are skimping on book coverage, having your book featured on the front page of *The New York Times* science section is reason for celebration. That was the experience of Dan P. McAdams on May 22, whose 2006 book, *The Redemptive Self* was cited in an article reviewing the relationship between personality and the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves.

"Researchers have found that the human brain has a natural affinity for narrative construction. People tend to remember facts more accurately if they encounter them in a story rather than in a list," the *Times* reported.

McAdams told the interviewer, "'When we first started studying life stories, people thought it was just idle curiosity — stories, isn't that cool?"

"Well, we find that these narratives guide behavior in every moment, and frame not only how we see the past but how we see ourselves in the future."

He's a professor of psychology at Northwestern University.

"Notable" Political History

Taylor Pensoneau recently published a biography of W. Russell Arrington, one of the most powerful leaders in the history of the Illinois state legislature.

Powerhouse: Arrington from Illinois (American Literary Press), according to the *Springfield State Journal-Register*, tells how during his 28 years in House and Senate Arrington laid the foundation "of the government we see today."

The *Illinois Times* called

Pensoneau's writing style and research a "notable achievement."

Pensoneau, author of other political biographies, covered Illinois government for a dozen years for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.

Schools Use Immigration Story

A book by Candace Fleming was one of the titles chosen by Suburban Mosaic, an educational group covering several Chicago suburbs, for a reading list focusing on immigration.

Lowji Discovers America, for grades three to five, tells the story of how a nine-year-old moves from India to a small town in Illinois.

Fleming is the author of more than a dozen children's books.

"Guru of Disaster Recovery"

Now it's official: James C. Schwab, a past president of SMA and current program chairman, is a "guru."

He writes environmental books and works as a senior research associate and editor for the American Planning Association.

In an article about what's next for Greensburg, Kan., after being destroyed by a tornado, *The New York Times* went to him for a quote because he is "considered a guru of disaster recovery."

Schwab said communities vary: some want to put things back they way they were; others want to start over.

Author Beats Own Drum

Billy McCarthy, who's a musician as well as an author, is hosting a new TV production featuring the "most ferocious drummers" in popular music.

He's also working as executive producer on *Gansta City*, a documentary about Chicago's notorious Cabrini Green housing project.

It's scheduled to premiere at the Sundance Film Festival.

His next book, *Beat Me Till I'm Famous*, will chronicle his "journey

as a drummer from the Midwest into Hollywood among the infamous, powerful and notorious during the 1980s."

Book Wins Gold Medal

Neal Samors' *Chicago in the Sixties: Remembering a Time of Change*, has won the 2007 Independent Publisher Gold Medal Book Award for history books.

The publisher was Chicago's Neighborhoods, Inc.

Page-Turner Now in Paperback

Robert Loerzel's book, *Alchemy of Bones: Chicago's Luetgert Murder Case of 1897*, is out now in paperback. It's an extensively researched non-fiction page-turner. Did Luetgert murder his wife or not? Read it to find out.

RECENT NEW MEMBERS

BY THOMAS FRISBIE

Richard Cahan

Writer, photojournalist and onetime *Chicago Sun-Times* picture editor, Cahan is author of *Real Chicago: Photographs From the Files of the Chicago Sun-Times* (co-authored with SMA members Michael Williams and Neal Samors); *A Court That Shaped America: Chicago's Federal District Court from Abe Lincoln to Abbie Hoffman*; *They All Fall Down: Richard Nickel's Struggle to Save America's Architecture*; *Richard Nickel's Chicago: Photographs of a Lost City* (co-authored with Michael Williams); *The Game That Was: The George Brace Baseball Photo Collection* (co-authored with SMA member Mark Jacob) *Chicago Under Glass: Early Photographs from the Chicago Daily News* (also co-authored with Jacob), and other books.

Cahan also was co-owner with his wife, Catherine of the Evanston shop CityFiles: Chicago Arts & Books.