

Member news

Phyllis Whitney, the Society of Midland Authors' most senior member, recently wrote to the Authors Guild, saying: "I am 104 years old and have written 76 books. I hope to bring out the first part of my autobiography, which deals with my life in the Orient, in a small volume. I was born in Yokohama, Japan, of American parents."



Phyllis Whitney

Whitney received an SMA Lifetime Achievement Award in 1995. ... **Studs Terkel** has a title in mind for his next book, *Among My Souvenirs*. ... **Carol Felsenthal** has finished writing *Clinton in Exile: A President Out of the White House*, a book about Bill Clinton's post-presidency. It will be published March 25 by William Morrow. Also, HBO will soon start production of a television adaptation of Felsenthal's biography of Katharine Graham, *Power, Privilege and the Post: The Katharine Graham Story*. Joan Didion has written the revised screenplay. ... A review by **Katherine Shonk** of a new book of photographs from the album of Leo Tolstoy's wife appeared Dec. 14 in the Moscow Times. ... **Joan Cashin's** book, *First Lady of the Confederacy: Varina Davis's Civil War*, has won the Fletcher Pratt Award for books on the Civil War. (Last May, it also won an SMA award for biography.) ... **Cheryl Reed** has completed the manuscript of her first novel, tentatively titled *Truth and Lies*. ... The Asian American Writers' Workshop presented one of its 10th annual literary awards late last year to fiction writer **Samrat Upadhyay**. ... On Dec. 7, three days before the first Jane Addams Day in Illinois, **Charles J. Masters** was invited to speak at the Chicago History

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Telling a story in a way that interests publishers

Author describes his efforts to transform an idea into successful book

BY THOMAS FRISBIE

Kevin Davis likes to tell stories that other people aren't telling. The challenge, Davis told SMA members at the Society's January program, is that publishers aren't always eager to publish stories that other publishers aren't publishing.

Davis, whose first book for adults was *The Wrong Man* (1996, Avon), decided he wanted to write his next book about public defenders. His experience as a reporter taught him that most information for crime stories comes from police and prosecutors, who have all the early facts during a case, while defense lawyers might not yet know who their client is.

"Having been a crime reporter for so many years, I wanted to take a look at the criminal justice system that I didn't see that often," Davis said.

For his book about public defenders, Davis thought his model should be Baltimore Sun police reporter David Simon's *Homicide: A Year on the Killing Streets*, "an amazingly successful book that became a TV series," but somehow that didn't translate into an immediately

workable idea.

"My book idea floundered for some time because it didn't have focus," Davis said. "That first proposal was weak, looking back on it.

"When you send book proposals to these publishers in New York, it is a hard sell," Davis added. "One of these rejection notices kind of hit the nail on the head for me, [with the writer saying] I think we would be more interested if you

focused on a single case, or found a character to follow for the whole book."

Following that advice, Davis considered focusing on the case of Girl X, who in 1997 was found raped, beaten and poisoned in the seventh-floor stairwell of a Chicago public housing complex. The defense lawyer, however, just didn't provide the

kind of material that a good read is based on, Davis thought.

"He wasn't interesting," Davis said. "I hate to say that, [but] he couldn't tell his story in a way that I needed to tell it in the book.

"People want a good narrative," he added. "They want a reason to turn the page.

"The biggest lesson I learned in this nonfiction book project is that it really takes a lot of sacrifice before it happens. You almost have to put as much work into

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Kevin Davis

Correction

One of the judges' addresses listed in the December issue of Literary License

was incorrect.

Adult Fiction judge Donna Seaman's correct address is 4159 N. Lawndale, Chicago, 60618.

Birth of the United States gets a revolutionary look

On Feb. 12, Chicago area historian and Northwestern Illinois University professor emeritus Joseph C. Morton will present "Was the American Revolution Evolutionary or Revolutionary?" at the regular SMA monthly program. His talk will focus on how the American Revolution (1763-1789) gave birth to a new world republic and a philosophy based on freedom, liberty and equality for all *free* people and how the philosophical concepts articulated and partially and imperfectly implemented by the Founders of the Republic, the Framers of the Constitution and their political successors have remained the model for positive change for people worldwide.

Literary License:

You are a specialist in the history of the colonial era and your books, The American Revolution and Shapers of the Great Debate at the

Constitutional Convention of 1787 focus on the early days of the American republic. What led you to focus on that era?

Joseph C. Morton: My interest in early United States history stems from my parents' insistence that our family, during my formative years, visit virtually every historical marker, every historical site, and museum in Washington, D.C., and nearby Maryland and Virginia. Growing up in the nation's capital and attending D.C. public schools gave me the opportunity, at a tender age, to become somewhat familiar with the rich historical heritage of the area. Thus I was, as a youth, allowed the freedom to ride for hours on end on the underground railroad between the Senate Office Building and the Capitol, to run up and down the stairs inside the Washington Monument, to walk in and out of the White House, to run up and down the stairs *inside* the Capitol dome, to visit frequently the Smithsonian Museums and to spend hours in the general reading room of the Library of Congress. In addition, my father, a

research engineer at the Johns Hopkins University, insisted that his family visit virtually every battlefield and historical site in Maryland and northern Virginia. From this upbringing, it was perhaps inevitable that, when I attended college first at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and later at the University of Maryland, I would study early American history.

LL: *The Bush administration promotes such concepts as the unitary president, signing statements designed to reshape legislation passed by Congress and an interventionist foreign policy. How much have these policies brought new attention to the debates at the founding of the republic over the role and form of government?*



Q&A
with
Joseph C. Morton

JCM: The current president in promoting such concepts is only pursuing policies, although more aggressively, that many our chief executives have attempted in the past. However, because President George W. Bush seems to be more blatant and open, according to his growing number of critics, in his attempts to enhance presidential power at the expense of Congress and to introduce a "preemptive" foreign policy, there is growing concern that he is acting unconstitutionally and violating the "original intent" of the Founders of the Republic and Framers of the Constitution of 1787.

LL: *How well do citizens today understand the issues at the heart of the American Revolution?*

JCM: During a 40-year teaching career at the college and university level, I became increasingly aware that Americans (even many intelligent, well-read Americans) were not at all familiar with their country's history. I would often ask my university students (presumably our future leaders) elementary questions regarding American history and was usually sur-

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Museum about Jane Addams, Hull House and the political climate during the turbulent times of her life.

His speech was co-sponsored by the American Association of University Women, and more than 300 people attended. ... USA Today included

Jonathan Eig's

Opening Day: The Story of Jackie

Robinson's First Season on its roster of holiday sports books. Also, in the Dec. 16 Chicago Tribune, Eig told how 36 hours after his daughter was born, with his wife's permission, he slipped out of the hospital room and took a cab to Wrigley Field, where he hoped to see Roger Clemens win his 300th game, and how foolish he feels now after a recent report linked Clemens to steroids. ... At the American Hellenic Institute Foundation's 2007 conference, the Modern Greek Studies Association's Recognition of Excellence Award was given to novelist and short story writer **Harry Mark Petrakis**. ... **Daniel Dinello's** latest story "Zombified" appeared in the Show Section of the Dec. 9 Chicago Sun-Times. It was about science fiction author Richard Matheson and the influence of his 1954 novel *I Am Legend* on modern horror art. An earlier Dinello article about neurofeedback appeared in the Q section of the Nov. 11 Chicago Tribune. ... **James Conroyd Martin** will sign *Across a Crimson Sky* at 2 p.m., Jan. 19 at Borders, 1144 Lake, Oak Park, Ill. ... **Roger Ebert** was one of six honorees saluted at the 17th annual Gotham Awards in November in New York for contributions to independent film. ... An essay by **Joseph Epstein** is included in —30—: *The Collapse of the Great American Newspaper*, essays selected by Charles M. Madigan, a former Chicago Tribune writer. ... The Dec. 11 Chicago Tribune carried an essay by **James Finn Garner** on the cold nights and warm feelings of selling Christmas trees in a frigid lot for



Jonathan Eig

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Queen of Angels, at Western and Sunnyside Avenues. ... **Stuart Meek** now is in Trenton, N.J., at Rutgers in the Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, heading up the Center for Government Services, a training, continuing education and research unit of the school. He has several articles about to appear on planning issues in academic publications. ...

Jean Bethke Elshtain was quoted in the Arizona Republic last month about presidential candidate Mitt Romney. Also, Elshtain will be one of two keynote speakers at the Feb. 15-16 "Theology of Sept. 11" conference in Colorado. She also appeared on the Boston University radio station WBUR's "On



**Jean Bethke
Elshtain**

Point" program in November to discuss the topic: "America's liberal left and its hopes for a liberal moment." ... On a 25-minute segment of "Chicago Tonight" last month with John Callaway, **Richard Lindberg** discussed the 1955 Schuessler-Peterson murders, their impact on Chicago and his book, *Shattered Sense of Innocence: the 1955 Murders of Three Chicago Children*. Also, Ben Calhoun of NPR interviewed Lindberg for a segment of "All Things Considered" that aired nationally in December about the impact of a casino in downtown Chicago. Lindberg mentioned a 19th century precedent: Mike McDonald and his illegal casino, the "Store," which operated at Clark and Monroe through the 1870s and 1880s. Lindberg's forthcoming biography – the first of McDonald – is titled *There's a Sucker Born Every Minute: Michael C. McDonald and the Rise of the Criminal-Political Underworld of Chicago*. The manuscript went to Southern Illinois University Press right after Thanksgiving following three years of research and writing, and the book is scheduled to come out next fall. ... **Paul McComas**

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Q & A

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prised (appalled!) at their lack of knowledge. Therefore, I believe that many American citizens are unaware of the issues "at the heart of the American Revolution" or for that matter many of the other seminal events and movements (e.g., Civil War, Native American genocide, exploitation of African Americans and women, and World War II) of our history.

LL: *The "original intent" of the founders is a topic at the heart of recent Supreme Court rulings. Do today's justices interpret "original intent" correctly?*

JCM: The "original intent" of the Framers of the Constitution of 1787 is not well understood today even by scholars and justices. The Constitution, as originally written, was a bare-bones document hastily crafted and often ambiguously worded for a late-eighteenth-century America that is no more.

As President Roosevelt remarked in the 1930s, the Constitution was written in "a horse and buggy" era and was therefore

not necessarily relevant to the Industrial Age of the 20th century or the Post-industrial Age of the 21st century. Because many of the significant discussions during the summer of 1787 were "off-record" (i.e., in sessions of the Committee of the Whole, where no records were kept or in informal, social gatherings at the numerous nearby taverns or pubs over appropriate libations), it is not possible, with exactness and certitude, to determine "original intent."

Instead, students of the Constitution can formulate general "educated guesses" (based on the extant journals and letters of the delegates) as to just what the Framers were attempting to do. A prime example of this would be that there is ample evidence (from a careful

reading of the delegate journals and letters) that the Framers intended to make the national legislative the most powerful branch of government. What we have today is executive branch supremacy; made possible, in part, by Supreme Court rulings, which reflect, in many cases, a mis-reading or mis-interpreting of what the Framers apparently originally intended.

Feb. 12, 2008, program

Cliff Dwellers
200 S. Michigan Avenue
22nd floor

6 p.m. - Social Hour
7:00 p.m. - Program

Free - members, teachers, students
\$5.00 - general public

Telling a story

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a good book proposal as you do into the book. A book proposal has to be really good to make it on top of the pile."

Davis finally decided to use public defender Marijane Placek as the central character in his book, *Defending the Damned: Inside Chicago's Cook County Public Defender's Office* (2007, Atria). When he walked into her office, she was watching "Divorce Court" on a little black-and-white TV on her desk. She had a shoe rack with two dozen pairs of shoes, and when Davis asked about a pair of cowboy books, she said, "They call me the gunslinger."

"I thought," Davis said, "OK, you are a character."

For a long time, publishers still didn't call, and Davis started referring to a box full of notes and information as the "box of broken dreams." Finally, though, his agent phoned and said a publisher was interested.

Once Davis started writing, he had so much information it was difficult to decide what to leave out. He had to cut out characters he really liked and in one place trimmed away a whole chapter. He even cut out a description of Oprah Winfrey showing up for jury duty because it didn't advance the narrative.

After the book was published, a police sergeant from a Chicago district came up to Davis at a book signing and said, "I just want to tell you, it was all right."

"There's no higher praise I could get," Davis said.

New books

"Vivid picture"

The Detroit Free Press on Dec. 14 said **Sharon M. Draper's** *November Blues* (October, 2007, Atheneum), a sequel to *The Battle of Jericho*, "paints a vivid picture of how pregnancy changes life" for a teenager.

"Front Page" news

Michelle Weldon, assistant professor at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, will be signing her latest book, *Everyman News: The Changing American Front Page* (December, 2007, University of Missouri Press) this month and in February. In analyzing today's newspapers, Weldon reports that stories have become more personal, more inclusive, less distant from readers' experiences. Once called the first draft of history, news has become more of an anecdotal companion, she writes.

Trade publication

Longtime SMA member **Jane Anne Morris'** *Gaveling Down the Rabble: How 'Free Trade' Is Stealing Our Democracy* (2008, The Apex Press) explores a century and a half of efforts by corporations and the courts to undermine local democracy in the United States by using a free trade model, which, she says, is really a not-so-free trade model. Free trade is a 19th century concept later adopted globally by corporations to subvert local attempts at protecting the environment and citizen and worker health, Morris writes. She argues that since the late 1800s the U.S. Supreme Court has been cutting local, state and national democracy off at the knees by usurping the power to make public policy from Congress and the state legislatures and by giving power to corporations over citizens. The Apex Press is the publishing arm of the Council on International and Public Affairs.

An author who knows beans

Good reviews have been sprouting up for **Raymond Bial's** new children's book, *The Super Soybean* (Albert Whitman). The Chicago Tribune said: "Raymond Bial produces an interesting history of this truly multipurpose veggie, whence it

came and when, and all the jobs it can do." *The Super Soybean* also received excellent reviews in Booklist, School Library Journal, Kirkus and elsewhere. It was recently named book of the year by the Wisconsin Ag in the Classroom program and is up for a number of other awards.

"Mix of humor and charm"

Paul McComas' comedic coming-of-age novel, *Planet of the Dates* (2008, The Permanent Press), will be published on Valentine's Day. Publisher's Weekly called it "a likable mix of humor and charm."

"Elegant analysis"

Willis Goth Regier's *In Praise of Flattery* (November, 2007, University of Nebraska Press) includes hundreds of historical examples of flattery from the highest social circles in politics, romance, and religion, from the courts of Byzantium and China to Paris, Rome, and Washington, D.C. In a Dec. 28 review, the Wall Street Journal called *In Praise of Flattery* "an elegant analysis." Publishers Weekly said, "The research is thorough and the writing compelling in historian Regier's latest ... a trove of rhetorical-philosophical gems."

A "Best Book"

Margaret McMullan's new young adult novel, *When I Crossed No-Bob*, (Houghton Mifflin) is on the School Library Journal's list of the "Best Books of 2007." The journal's editors selected 63 books from the 4,500 titles they reviewed



Margaret McMullan

How I Found the Strong (2004, Houghton Mifflin). McMullan is a professor of English at the University of Evansville in Evansville, Ind.

last year. Set in Mississippi just after the Civil War, the book tells the story of a young girl, Addy O'Donnell, who must adjust to a new life when she is abandoned by her mother. It is the sequel to McMullan's novel

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will read from and sign *Planet of the Dates* (see New Books, Page 4) at two free local publication parties: Feb. 22, 7-10 p.m., Writers WorkSpace, 5443 N. Broadway, Chicago, and Feb. 23, 7-10 p.m., Pick-A-Cup Coffee Club, 1813 Dempster Ave. ... **Rob Warden**, executive director of the Center on Wrongful Convictions at Northwestern University's School of Law, was interviewed last month in the Daily Herald about the \$15.5 million verdict in a lawsuit over the Riley Fox investigation. (In an accompanying editorial, the Herald incorrectly called it the Center for Wrongful Convictions.) Warden also was quoted last month in the Chicago Tribune about an Oakbrook Terrace, Ill.-area man who told a judge he wanted the death penalty. ... The Lifetime television movie production of **Sue William Silverman's** memoir, *Love Sick: One Woman's Journey Through Sexual Addiction* (see October, 2007, Literary License), now has a premiere date: March 1. See local listings for times and subsequent airings. Also, *Love Sick* (W. W. Norton) is now available in paperback. More information is at www.suewilliamsilverman.com. ...

Darwin McBeth Walton organized a diverse Kwanzaa celebration Dec. 29 at York Center Church of the Brethren in Lombard, Ill. She's author of *Kwanzaa, World of Holidays* (1998, Steck-Vaughn). ... **Scott Turow** was scheduled to appear Jan. 9 in Maryland, where activists are pushing for the abolition of the state's death penalty. He also will be the guest speaker Feb. 9 at the Literacy Chicago "Well-Read Ball" event in Chicago at Galleria Marchetti. ... The Sunshine Coast Daily (Australia) last month wrote of **Gerry and Janet Souter's** book *The Vietnam War Experience 1957-1974*: "Full of information, this book really talks to you – really!" ... **Robert Pruter's** *Chicago Soul (Music in American Life)* (1992) was quoted in a Dec. 23 Chicago Tribune story on the independent Vee-Jay label. ... **Michael Norman's** current project is a collection of ghost stories to be

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published in 2009 by the Minnesota Historical Society Press. ... **Margaret McMullan** (See New books) recently signed a two-book deal with Houghton Mifflin. Her book *When I Crossed No-Bob* was selected as one of the "Book Picks for 2007, the best books to read in which you'll lose yourself" by the Mississippi Press. ... University of South Carolina students, with the help of the university's mascot, Cocky, on Jan. 8 read "Itching and Twitching — A Nigerian Folktale" by Robert McKissack and **Patricia McKissack**. ... **Jacquelyn Mitchard** spoke to more than 500 guests Nov. 16 at the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, Greater Connecticut Chapter in Plantsville, Conn. Mitchard's novel, *The Breakdown Lane*, is about living with the sudden onset of a chronic illness. Mitchard's lifelong friend Jeanine was diagnosed several years ago with multiple sclerosis. ... Florida's OrlandoSentinel.com on Jan. 6 called *Havana Noir*, edited by **Achy Obejas**, "a superb collection of short stories." ... **J. Niimi** wrote a report on the musician Jandek Jan. 9 for SF.weekly.com in San Francisco. ... A Jan. 10 story in the SouthtownStar newspaper covering Chicago's South Side and south suburbs said of *Chicago: City on the Move* by **Michael Williams** and **Richard Cahan**, "It's great for capturing the early days of Chicago's elevated train network, the subterranean efforts to build the city's subway system and the nostalgic days when streetcars, with names such as the Sewing Machines, the 169s and the Turtlebacks, glided along neighborhood streets." The book has more than 200 black-and-white photos spread over 250 pages. "When we started out, we figured it would be a book for train freaks," Cahan told the SouthtownStar. "The truth is it is more about Chicago. It is about how the city grew." ... The Boston Globe on Dec. 23 reviewed **Marlene Targ Brill's** *Marshall "Major" Taylor: World Champion Bicyclist: 1899-1901* (Lerner). Taylor was the first African American to win a world cycling championship. The Globe said the book "takes a fresh look."

With the news media, it's better to give if you want to receive

BY THOMAS CIESIELKA

Looking back at the recent holiday season, if you could have asked Santa for one thing this Christmas pertaining to your book promotion, what would it have been?

For the sake of this newsletter, let's say you want more media coverage.

Unfortunately, the big man in red is only familiar with chimneys, so we'll have to do this one ourselves.

Let's resort to the age old adage: "You must first give, in order to receive." To receive the publicity you want, you must first give the media something they want. But what do the media want? Well, I happen to have seen the media's wish list, and they want information. They want new material. They want the inside story. They are as eager to receive information as you are to give it to them.

So here are a few pointers on how to give the media exactly the type of information they want.

Everyone loves a good story

Sometimes it's good to simply list the basic facts, but other times what a reporter wants to see is how the information you give can be made into a story. For example, a book might be about a company that produced 8 million teapots this year, making it the biggest teapot supplier in the country. However, the story could revolve around how Americans are drinking more green and white tea due to new health benefits associated with them. Tying a bigger concept to your book makes the story more intriguing to the reporter and the public. It also makes you look more knowledgeable about trends in society.

Don't give Santa an electric razor

In other words, the information you give should be relevant. Make an effort to understand exactly to whom you are giving the information. Ask yourself if the



Thomas Ciesielka

reporter is going to be interested in the story. For example, Better Homes and Gardens might not necessarily care about a big free-speech case that gets extensive coverage in your book. Unless it had something to do with petunias.

Think "seasonal" and "timely"

Use the time of year to your advantage when creating a news angle. Being fresh and unique in your approach can win bonus points with reporters.

A gift card to information never fails

Of course it is ideal to give the media information about your company or have them quote you as a source.

The news media are as eager to receive information as you are to give it to them.

Unfortunately, not all news leads relate to you. However, maybe you know someone else who would be able to offer their expertise to a reporter. What the media like almost as much as information from you is information from you about how they can receive more pertinent information. Supply a reporter with a valuable source, and even offer to introduce the two. Reporters will be grateful to you for helping them and will be more open to hearing from you in the future.

If you are consistent and accurate with the information you give, the word will spread and you will have a good reputation in the media world. Think about it this way: there's always that one relative or friend who gives fantastic gifts that you look forward to receiving from each year.

New members

Anastasia Royal, an artist, composer musician, actress and writer with a B.A. in English Literature from Barat College, is author of a fictionalized literary memoir, *Undoing I Do* (2007, Thomas Dunne). Publishers Weekly said Royal "finds an enticing, offbeat rhythm." Booklist called

the book, "poignant, painful, lyrical." Redbook said, "you won't know whether to cry for her character's broken heart or swoon over the lyrical prose." Royal also is a classical pianist, has been a radio and television voice-over actor, and was recently in the independent film STASH, which was written and directed by Evanston native and author **Jay Bonansinga**.

Ronald Kirk Goulding a Chicago trial lawyer, is co-author of *Dead Man's Hand* (2006, Pemberton Mysteries) with his brother, a Florida physician. The book is about an unorthodox defense lawyer, Michael Corso, who has to confront his own demons in taking on the most baffling case of his career. The pair also wrote the screenplay for a soon-to-be-released movie, "All In," starring Academy Award-winning actor Louis Gossett Jr., Michael Madsen, Dominique Swain and James Russo. The two now are writing a political thriller and two other medical-legal thrillers.

Kristen Laine is a writer, editor, Radcliffe graduate, contributor to Vermont Public Radio and Indiana native. She is author of *American Band: Music, Dreams, and Coming of Age in the Heartland* (2007, Gotham). Publishers Weekly said, "First-time author Laine immersed herself in Elkhart, Indiana's Concord High School Marching Minutemen ... and emerges with a detailed and intimate account that delves deep into the rarified world of competitive high school marching. ... Laine brings passion, curiosity and affection to her heartland chronicle."

Literary License

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SMA support

Dues cover mailings and other organizational expenses, but the Society always needs additional money for programs such as the awards at the annual May banquet. Thanks to **Dolores Grengg**, who made a contribution since the last newsletter.

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