



Quill de Ville

www.WritersLeagueofTheVillages.com

Writers League of The Villages Newsletter

May 2023

“A poet who lives off of Morse”

We have a limerick winner, page 7

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Message from Your Newsletter Editor

Larry Martin
drlarry437@gmail.com



We had 13 entries for the Newsletter Limerick Contest. The winner is Limerick No. 5, by Barbara Rein. Her limerick is on [page 7](#), with an excerpt from her award-winning short story collection

This month's issue includes items by several members, in addition to the traditional president's message on page 4.

Part 2 of "Critique Clubs" is in the Appendix. In Part 1, last month, you may recall I mentioned that movies often mess with the facts, and that fiction writing usually has to adhere to a higher standard. In the 1959 movie "Some Like It Hot," the scene is supposedly Miami Beach, though it was filmed at the Coronado Hotel in San Diego – and you can see mountains in the background! Well, yours truly made his own error. I stated the beach scene included stars Paul Newman and Marilyn Monroe. Monroe, for sure, but not Newman; it was Tony Curtis. Thanks to member Carolee Owen for pointing out this mistake.

Regarding local critique groups, read Doc Honour's contribution about his critique group on [page 8](#).

At our April 12th general meeting we had an excellent panel discussion on "finishing your book." See pictures on [page 4](#). Leigh Court reported briefly on her experience with traditional publishing vs. self-publishing. I asked her to write a brief summary for our members, which you can read on [page 5](#).

Our communications director, Rita Boehm, reports on the B&N 2nd birthday anniversary on page 6.

Finally, last month's newsletter mentioned several opportunities for our members: Sign up for beta-reading, have your book reviewed in Villages Magazine, and sell your book at the Wildwood Antique Mall. Contact information for these opportunities is listed in Recurring Items on [page 9](#).



Your newsletter editor's team of helpers, reacting to some of the limericks.



Upcoming Events

May 2023

Thursday, May 4, 6:30-8:30 p.m. - Wine & Words, Riverbend Rec Center. Speakers are Bill Hurst and Alyson Ross.

Tuesday, May 9, 11a.m. - 2 p.m. - All Booked Up book signing, Colony Plaza. Authors are Barbara Wälz, Dan Varalli, and Julie Boyd.

Wednesday, May 10, 9-11 a.m. - WLOV General Meeting. Laural Manor Rec Center. Program is "Growing Your Writer's Brain: Insights and Techniques," by WLOV member, Tweet Coleman.

Saturday, May 20, 11 a.m.-2 p.m. - Book signing by Doc Honour and Cleo Simon, Wildwood Antique Mall, 364 Shopping Center Drive, Wildwood.

Saturday, May 20, 2 p.m. – Author presentations at Barnes & Noble.

President's Message: Congratulations on Your New Author Page!

By Frank A. Lancione, flancione@verizon.net



In the old pre-Internet days, if you wrote a book, you shopped it until some publisher decided to put you under contract. They set up publicity and public appearances for you. You signed books, smiled, and tried to make your book sound interesting. They handled the strategy and logistics. You just did what they asked you to do. Boy, things certainly have changed.

The rise of the Internet and the dominance of Amazon worldwide as a publisher and distributor of books have totally redefined the book selling process. Under the publishing house paradigm, only a very few lucky authors' books ever saw the light of day.

Today, in the world of self-publishing, each author can make their own decision on whether to offer their book for sale and market it to the public. Hooray! We're in charge! Wait a minute. Oh Heck! We're in charge.

Self-publishing means that the full burden of marketing our book falls upon us. Further, in the new world, marketing is a lot more than in-person book signing events. To be an effective self-publisher today requires that you establish and maintain a vibrant online social media presence and relentlessly court, entertain, and enthrall an entourage of reader/follower/customers.

There are members of our Writers League of The Villages who are great at this. They sell internationally through Amazon and other internet outlets, keep in contact weekly with followers through social media, and use Zoom and other tools to do livestream "meet the author" marketing events with fans all over the world. Then, there are the rest of us.

Writing a book doesn't mean you know how to design, program, and maintain an online presence or get noticed among the millions and millions of books being sold on Amazon. Fortunately, this is a place where being a member of WLOV can really help. You might not know it, but if you have submitted information on your new book to our Webmaster, Paula Howard, you already have an online presence.

Go to our WLOV homepage and click on the "Books" tab at the top. That takes you the page "Books by Members." Type my name, Frank A. Lancione, into the search bar and hit Enter on your keyboard.



That takes you to a page with the headline: [Search Results for Frank A. Lancione.](#)

There you see the title of my book, **Sunset Years: Poems for Seniors Who Still Love Life and Each Other**. Click on the cover and you go to what is effectively my WLOV-sponsored author page. The front cover of my book is shown, with a book blurb. There is an “about the author” write up and picture of me and my wife. From here you can:

- Copy the WLOV author page URL at the top in the browser bar. You now have a web address you can give to people that will take them directly to your WLOV author page. Mine is <https://writersleagueofthevillages.com/index.php/2023/02/10/sunset-years/>
- Hit the big red button, “Buy Book Here,” and you will be taken directly to the Amazon sales page to buy the book. Your page's button will go to your book's Amazon sales page.

What did I do to program all of this? Nothing. Our webmaster, Paula Howard, does all the work for anyone who submits information to her on their new books. Look up **your** name instead of mine. Navigate to your WLOV author page. Then copy the URL for your page at the top in the browser bar. You now have a web address you can give to people that will take them directly to your WLOV author page and then directly to where they can buy your book. Think of all you can do with this capability.

Put it on bookmarks and other marketing materials you develop. Include it in your e-mails. Print it on cards you hand out with your name and contact data when you meet new people. Include it on every post you make on social media. Get a tattoo . . . No, that would be too much. But you get the idea.

Just by being a member of WLOV, you have an online author presence. As a club, we are going to be looking at how to help our members make greater use of this resource going forward. In the meantime, “Congratulations on your new author page!”

General Meeting April 12th

Seated L to R, below: Paula Howard, Leigh Court, Steve Burt. They each gave an excellent presentation at our April 12th general meeting on “finishing your book.” See next page for Leigh Court’s experience with traditional publishing vs. self-publishing.





My Experience with Traditional Publishing vs. Self-Publishing

By Leigh Court

I write romance, and am what you'd call a "hybrid" author. I've had several books traditionally published, i.e., my books were bought by a publisher with a monetary advance (six books by four different publishers). Recently, though, I've gone 'Indie' and self-published seven books. The reason for this change is mainly over the issue of control. Once you sell your story to a traditional publisher, you don't have any control over the book cover, or (much) control over the final edit of your story.

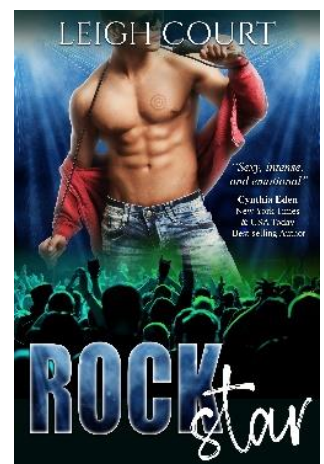
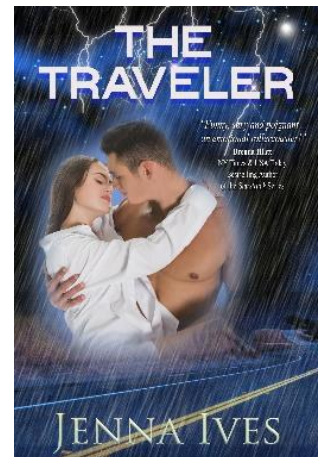
For example, I had an offer from a traditional publisher for *The Traveler*, written under my pseudonym Jenna Ives. However, the publisher's editor wanted me to change too much of the story. In the book, one of my minor characters dies of a paralyzing condition known as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), which the editor deemed "too depressing." However, this outcome is an important part of the storyline. Also, the hero and heroine don't end up together, which is a no-no in the romance world, but a very realistic ending to this particular story. So, I self-published the book.

A similar thing happened with my book *Rock Star*, published under Leigh Court. An editor asked for changes about the rock music business before she would commit to buying the book. My husband has spent his entire career in the music industry, and together we have toured the world with various rock bands. I knew what I was writing about in *Rock Star*; I didn't want to make the changes suggested to fit the editor's vision of my story, because they just weren't realistic. So, I self-published it, with the cover I wanted.

I now doubt I'll ever submit to a traditional publisher again. It's true that Indie authors work a lot harder than traditionally-published authors. When you self-publish you are responsible for the cover, final edit, marketing, etc.

Marketing, especially, can be frustrating, but there are certain strategies that have worked for me and are relatively inexpensive. One is The Fussy Librarian (www.thefussylibrarian.com). I have a four-book series called The Tau Cetus Chronicles, and every two months I set the first book in that series to free. The Fussy Librarian charges me \$12 to advertise the free book, but after more than a year of bi-monthly ads, I still make my money back in sales of the next three books in the series. Other options are BookBub ads (expensive) and Facebook ads; I've yet to get a return on investment with these two. A lot of Indie authors have also had success with Tik Tok's Book Tok as well as Instagram's Bookstagram.

I wish you much success on your publishing journey, and if you have any questions, you can email me at leigh@leighcourt.com or visit my websites at www.leighcourt.com and www.jennaives.com.



45 Writers' Rules for Writing

Authors Publish

Every writer has their own set of rules. See <https://authorspublish.com/45-writers-rules-for-writing/>

NEWS ITEMS ABOUT MEMBERS – FACEBOOK ALBUMS

WLOV members continue to make news. Below are the links to find news articles about members over the last three months. A few of the items are shown below the links.

FEBRUARY FACEBOOK NEWS ARTICLES POSTED

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.575057707995224&type=3>

MARCH FACEBOOK NEWS ARTICLES POSTED

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.593976442770017&type=3>

APRIL FACEBOOK NEWS ARTICLES POSTED

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.613561544144840&type=3>

Writers League Marks Two Years of Book Store Partnership

Members of the league feature their work at Barnes & Noble at Lake Sumter Landing.

By GARRETT SHIFLET
Daily Sun Staff Writers

no idea it would work out so well and be so successful," Boehm said. "It's a lot of work to organize and manage, but achieving this recent milestone of over 400 books sold and 100 authors featured has been rewarding."

Boehm also coordinates the partnership and has seen the positive impact it has on the club.

"The relationship with Barnes & Noble has created a lot of positive buzz in the club," Boehm said. "Our published authors look forward to an opportunity to have their books in the store, and it's



Bill Mitchell, Daily Sun
Frank Lancione, of the Village of Monarch Grove, and Rita Boehm, of the Village of Winfred, both members of the Writers League of The Villages, at Barnes & Noble at Lake Sumter Landing. The Writers League of The Villages is celebrating two years of partnership with Barnes & Noble.

VILLAGES AUTHORS

Gerry Lentz "Rooster! Amusing Tales of an Iowa Farmboy"

By taking notes about his experiences growing up on a farm in Iowa, G.G. Lentz unintentionally began writing this book. "Growing up on a farm wasn't easy, but it was a colorful and satisfying life," said Lentz, of the Village of Marsh Bend. Lentz's childhood experiences on a farm are chronicled in the book "Rooster! Amusing Tales of an Iowa Farmboy," which also includes an entire section dedicated to heirloom recipes of his mother's flavorful Czechoslovakian dishes. Tales go from the quirky to the comical. Recipes go from delicious meats and breads to pastries and much more. The book contains pictures which show the scenes of the family and their home.



Daily Sun

VILLAGES AUTHORS

Dan Kincaid "Kade Holley, Forest Ranger series Vol. III"

A forest ranger for the U.S. Forest Service for 31 years, Dan Kincaid, of the Village of Dunedin, had plenty to tell about his career. And tell he has across 13 books, his latest being on the Kade Holley series dubbed "Kade Holley, Forest Ranger series Vol. III". Each book in his series has five self-contained stories within, which are based on some of the experiences Kincaid personally encountered or heard about as a forest ranger. Kincaid hopes his books inspire a new generation of forest rangers. "I wanted to tell young people what it's like to be a forest ranger," Kincaid said, adding it can be read by anyone with a love for the outdoors. Kincaid said his favorite experience was looking back on his career and trying to tell that story. "Trying to relive and remember it all, it was a rewarding career," Kincaid said.



Daily Sun

VILLAGES AUTHORS

W. H. Jansen "When the Owl Speaks: An Arctic Mystery"

W. H. Jansen, of the Village of Ocoee Hills, has recently published his latest book "When the Owl Speaks: An Arctic Mystery." Jansen's 367-page story involves a graduate student researching an Inuit village in Nunavut, but it takes a turn for the worse as a murder mystery emerges. Jansen based the story on his own experiences doing doctoral work on the Arctic and far north region tribes as an anthropologist for nearly six years. "I enjoy finding the words that convey the ideas of my story in the minds of the reader," Jansen said. Jansen hopes readers enjoy the books by relating to his characters and find the commonalities in the distinct culture portrayed. "It's a good read and a fun one," Jansen said. Jansen's books are available on amazon.com.



VILLAGES AUTHOR SPOTLIGHT

THE DEACON AND THE SHIELD
by John E. Howard, Village of Calumet Grove

Genre: Military/Christian

This book is the tale of a veteran's struggle for life after combat. Torn between the harshness of the Vietnam War and yearning for spiritually, a young soldier tries to tackle it all. The darkness of the battlefield was overwhelming and sickened his soul. Will he ever be able to regain the love of his family, his self-respect, his Deaconship and his faith in God?

Q: WHAT PROMPTED YOU TO WRITE YOUR BOOK?
I wrote the book, as a Deacon in the Church of Christ and a veteran of the Vietnam War, to emphasize the need to seek mental health treatment for PTSD. In addition to conventional treatments where continual care is necessary, one may consider spirituality as another proven path to peace of mind.

Q: WHAT DO YOU HOPE READERS TAKE AWAY AFTER READING YOUR BOOK?
The Villages has a huge number of war-zone veterans and many are experiencing some level of PTSD. My hope is to reach as many as possible with this inspirational Christian story. The characters are fictional for the most part, but the messages are based on actual events.

Q: WHAT CLUBS, ACTIVITIES AND HOBBIES DO YOU ENJOY?
Writers League of The Villages, Baby Boomers Club, Ohio State Club, Senior Games – Basketball & Track, American Legion Post 347, Vietnam Veteran Post 1036.

Q: HOW DO YOU PROMOTE YOUR BOOK?

Author: John E. Howard

THE DEACON and the SHIELD

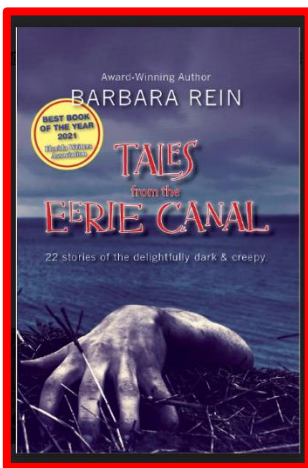
Author: John E. Howard

SKIN AND COM DER TOT MO

Barbara Rein is the Winner of the Newsletter Limerick Contest.

Below is her limerick that won the most votes as “favorite,” followed by an excerpt from her award-winning book.

A poet who lives off of Morse
Lassoes rhymes while bucked on a horse.
“Why pen on a stallion
In your hat of ten gallon?”
“‘Cause It’s a Wrote-E-O,” he retorts.



Tales from the Eerie Canal: Stories of the Delightfully Dark and Creepy.
<https://www.amazon.com/Tales-Eerie-Canal-Stories-Delightfully/dp/173493557X/>

NAMED “2021 BEST BOOK OF THE YEAR” BY FLORIDA WRITERS ASSOCIATION

Below is an excerpt from ‘Swan Song at the Hotel Swank,’ a story from my book. It was chosen for inclusion in *I Used to be an Animal Lover: an extraordinary and eclectic collection of short stories*. Just released on Amazon Kindle, *Animal Lover* includes 49 short stories by 18 authors from around the world. <https://amzn.to/418HybT>

Franklin bared his canines at the insistent buzzing of the doorbell. The insolence of someone imposing on his practice time. Didn’t they see the “Do Not Disturb” sign hanging on his door? After half an hour of warm-up scales, his tail a handy metronome, he’d paused for a few licks of imported Earl Grey. The interruption came as he sang the opening notes of an aria from *The Barker of Seville*. Ears flat and tail en garde, he slapped down his sheet music in disgust and picked up his cane. Italian leather loafers sounded an uneven staccato as he limped across the marble floor to see who dared invade his time.

First, though, he stopped at the foyer mirror to preen. He noted the sash of his burgundy silk smoking jacket had little left to tie. The problem wasn’t with the sash but with his expanding girth. Though still handsome with a patrician nose and perfect markings, his oblong dachshund physique had become more knockwurst than Ball Park Frank. He placed blame on the ease of ordering room service whenever the urge struck.

Living in the penthouse suite at The Swank, a hoity-toity, full-service residential hotel on New York’s Central Park South, had its perks: a twenty-four-hour concierge, private rooftop garden, and varying heights of peepholes on the apartment doors. Franklin peered out of his at the two-foot mark. His view, the bottom third of the offender, showed frayed khakis, miss-matched argyle socks, and scuffed, thick-soled shoes. Franklin sniffed. A human. Sensing nothing offensive other than expired aftershave, he opened the door and looked up.

All Booked Up, Colony Plaza - Update

By Bill Pullen - (352) 430-3006 or billanita@att.net

Picture from the All Booked Up book signing on Tuesday, April 11th

L to R: Bill Hurst (*Marooned in 1799*), Frank Lancione (club president), Jeanne Rogers (*The Gift of Sunderland*), Doc Honour (*Not Like Us*)

Book signers for Tuesday, May 9th are Barbara Walz, Dan Varalli, and Julie Boyd.



May 2023 - WLOV Books for sale in All Booked Up

Fiction

Dan Michael - "terminal STATE"

Julie Boyd - "The Bluejacket Legacy"

Rita Boehm - "The Price of Revenge"

Non-Fiction

Mary Westcott - "Living Light"

Judith Glynn - "The Street or Me: a New York Story"

Children's Book

Barbara Walz - "Take Me to the Zoo" (2 - 8 years)

Villages Magazine Author for May

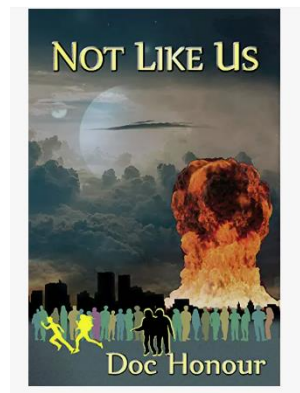
Leigh Court - "Rock Star"

My Critique Group -- Working Writers Workshop

By Doc Honour, author of *Not Like Us*, a sci-fi thriller at the end of a world.



My writing has taken many long strides forward since joining the Working Writers Workshop here in The Villages two years ago. I've completed over twenty short stories and two books (*Tales of Verdant* and *Not Like Us*), all of which have been honed to a bright edge by these close friends. One of my stories, "Fishing Hands," won Gold in the 2022 Royal Palm Literary Awards. Four other stories have gained Honorable Mention in the international Writers of the Future quarterly contests. None of this would have been possible without the WWW group. Even more, though, I've become very confident in what I write—and also often gained a dose of needed humility.



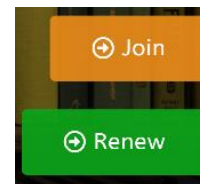
The club meets every Tuesday morning, at Canal Rec Center. We focus on fiction, and aim to help each other move our writing into publication. Readers for each week send out their reading (about 2500 words) the week before. We all give detailed email critique during the week, in time for the author to revise. During our weekly meeting, the authors read aloud while everyone else marks up a printed copy, followed by verbal thoughts for improvement. Two rounds of powerful improvement in a week! Every chapter of my recent book, *Not Like Us* (available on Amazon), went through this process, sometimes generating completely new story threads.

Our critiques often operate on several levels. We do line editing, yes, but more important are the corrections to plot continuity, character development, descriptive language, and facts. (Of course, in science fiction I can often play fast and loose with “facts,” but I still have to make it all consistent!) I have often been amazed how different my story is before and after.

We have room for a couple more members who are serious about creating published fiction. Contact Phil Walker at walkhouse@yahoo.com or me at ehonoursr@gmail.com if you're interested.

Recurring Items of Interest

- **Facebook page: Writers League of The Villages**
<https://www.facebook.com/The-Writers-League-of-The-Villages-162776817086391/>
- **Members-only FB Group for posting: WLOV Group**
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/2456384291302772/>
- **WLOV Beta-Reading initiative.** Details in April Newsletter. To learn about the program, contact Julie Feingold, juliesdesk47@gmail.com.
- ***The Villages Magazine* – Author Spotlight Opportunity.** Details in April Newsletter. Contact Francesca Boroden, franceboroden@gmail.com
- **Master Class Writing Videos:** Thursdays at 4 p.m. WLOV members will receive an email notice from Paula Howard prior to these videos; if you don't get one, email her at pfhoward777@gmail.com.
- **To review past WLOV newsletters,** go to <https://writersleagueofthevillages.com/> and click on Newsletters in the top banner.
- **Pay 2023 dues online, \$20.** You can pay via credit card or PayPal. To join or renew, go to www.writersleagueofthevillages.com. Click on “Join Now” then choose Join or Renew. If you encounter any problems email WLOVwriters@gmail.com.
- **Village Neighbors Magazine**
If you'd like to be featured in Mark Newhouse's monthly Writing Bug column in Village Neighbors Magazine, email him at mark@newhouse.net.



BARNES & NOBLE – ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

By Rita Boehm

WOW! On April 8th we celebrated the Second Year anniversary of our partnership with Barnes & Noble, with a standing-room-only crowd of close to 75 people who attended. →.

Everyone enjoyed partaking of the delicious celebratory cake, and then listened to six of our twelve featured authors talk about their books. The remaining six authors will be featured at our May 20th kick-off event at 2:00 p.m. You don't want to miss it.

To date, over 100 WLOV members have been offered an opportunity to participate in our Barnes & Noble events—and over 450 books have been sold.

Note: Starting with our Q3 event in July, we'll begin a selection process which includes inviting back authors whose books have already been featured, while giving preference to members who have not yet had the opportunity of a Barnes & Noble experience.

Visit the store. Ask for the WLOV local author bookshelf and support your fellow local authors!

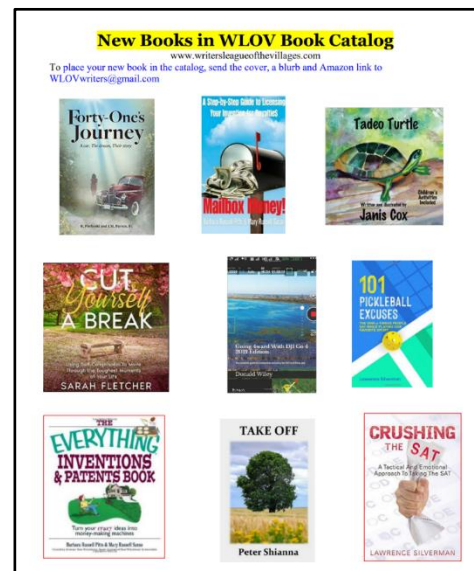
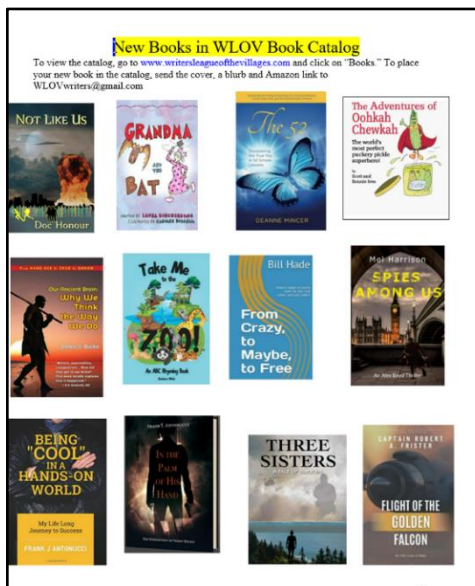
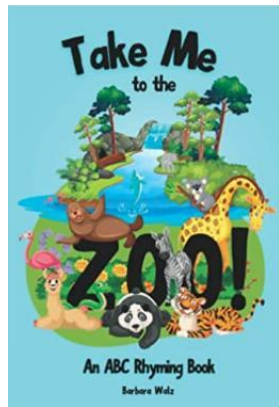
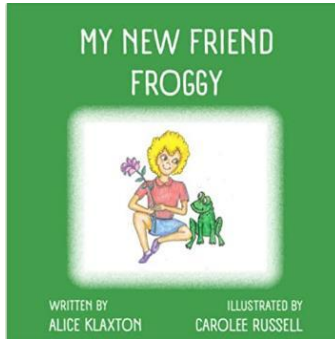
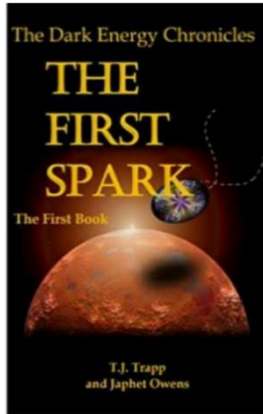
Pictured below, L to R:

- Rita Boehm, JJ Clarke, and Phyllis Walters pose with their books in front of the WLOV display.
- Smiling members Julie Boyd and Francesca Boroden pose with their featured books.
- Barnes & Noble event organizer Rita Boehm, and WLOV President Frank Lancione, showing off the sheet cake celebrating the 2-year anniversary of our successful relationship with Barnes & Noble, including the “typo” made by the bakery. “With Love” was supposed to say “WLOV”!



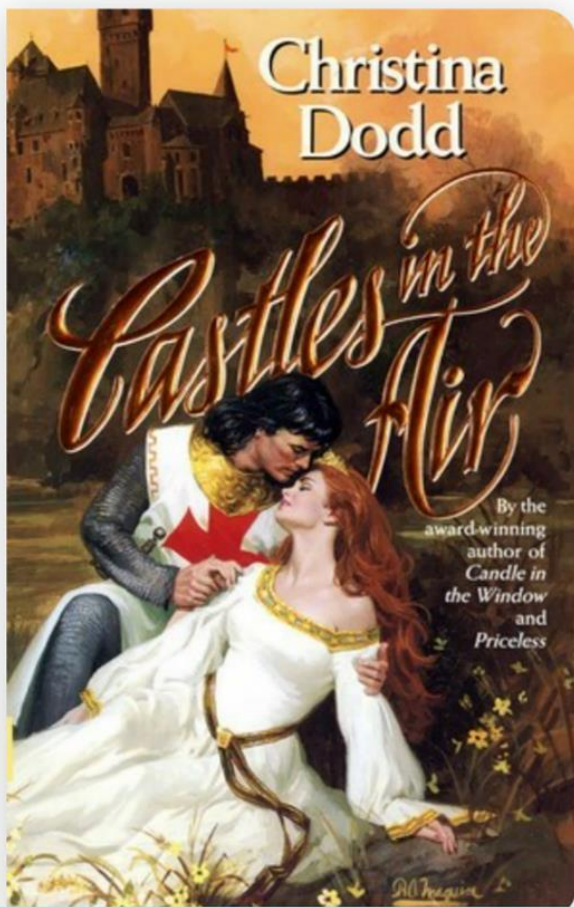
Six New Books in WLOV Book Catalog

To view the catalog, go to www.writersleagueofthevillages.com and click on “Books.” To place your new book in the catalog, send the cover, a blurb and Amazon link to WLOVwriters@gmail.com. Below the 6 covers of new books are screen shots of WLOV catalog books as published in the March (left) and April (right) 2023 newsletters.



Cartoons...and More

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS BOOK COVER? In her Presentation at last month's general Meeting, Leigh Court showed this Romance novel cover from a Traditional publisher. Hint: "Three's a crowd."





From The New Yorker



Appendix: Critique Clubs – Part 2

Chapter from *My Writing Life: With Advice for the Beginning Writer*

www.lakesidepress.com/MyWritingLife.pdf

By Larry Martin, drlarry437@gmail.com

Part 1 was published in last month's newsletter, and is on the club's website at <https://writersleagueofthevillages.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/WLOV-Newsletter-April-2023.pdf>

In my first few years of retirement from medicine, I tried out four different critique clubs. The first three served their purpose for a while but, for various reasons, I quit them. One did not give out printed copies and when the author read his or her piece, it was often hard to follow the dialogue or know just which character was speaking. Another group required that someone else read the author's work which was not good (for me) since the reader often didn't emphasize words or phrases as I intended. Yet another group spent way too much time on each author and it became tiresome after a while. It also meant you didn't get to read every week – more like every three or four weeks. Critique clubs and groups vary in style and you may have to try out more than one to get the best fit for yourself.

The club I ended up with – called Wannabes, as in "wannabe writers" – gives each reader twenty minutes to read and receive a critique. You read for about ten minutes (1500-2000 words) and then get verbal feedback. Half the group consists of published, experienced authors, and the others are actively writing their first book. This club also requires that copies be emailed out ahead of each weekly meeting. After you read out loud and receive oral comments, you get your piece back with written comments from each member.

What should you not expect from a critique group?

Mistakes of the nature discussed in Part 1 are easy to point out. But what about the larger picture, the entire story as it were, the arc of the book? Does it flow and/or present a coherent narrative? Such larger questions are difficult to answer in most critique groups where only about 2000 words are read every week; you may not remember what was read the previous week, let alone months earlier.

For feedback about a whole book, authors have several options. One is to hire a "developmental editor," a professional who will read the work, critique how your story unfolds, and make recommendations for major changes, if needed. Some authors use professional editors for both story development and "line editing," in which word choice and syntax are also critiqued. Editing for these purposes is expensive and many self-published authors forego it.

Another option is to use "beta readers," typically non-professionals who will read your completed work from the standpoint of a general reader: not to nitpick mistakes such as discussed in Part 1, but to give general feedback on the story. They may do it for free, charge some fee, or just ask for an exchange, where they read and comment on your book and you do

the same for theirs. You can easily find beta-reading opportunities with a quick internet search. One popular site with a large beta-reading group is goodreads.com.

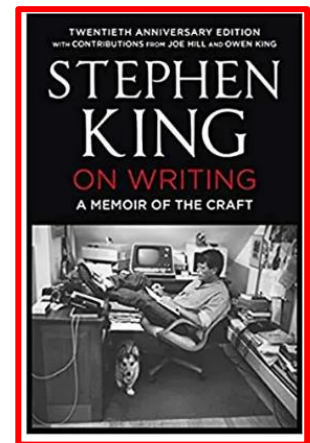
A third option, the least recommended but probably better than nothing, is to have a friend or relative read your book, preferably someone who is also a writer. Just be aware they may not be as objective as a professional reviewer and may hold back on negative (though deserved) criticism.

What can you expect from a critique group?

Assume you feel comfortable with your group and get feedback on a regular basis, what can you expect? Here, I'll quote Stephen King, from his highly-recommended book *On Writing*. After giving specific advice on the tools a writer needs, and how to go about using them, he wrote:

While it is impossible to make a competent writer out of a bad writer, and while it is equally impossible to make a great writer out of a good one, it is possible, with a lot of hard work, dedication, and timely help, to make a good writer out of a merely competent one.

That's what you can expect from a critique group. If you're bad – because you can't write good grammar, can't compose a coherent narrative, can't keep your characters straight, can't separate reality from fantasy – you're unlikely to improve in a weekly critique group. And if you're good, say you get published and people read your work, attending a critique group will likely not elevate your writing to the level of Dickens, Dostoevsky, or Melville.



But, if you are merely competent, have none of the defects of a bad writer, and strive to learn about the rules of writing, accept feedback and the necessity of rewriting to improve your work, a critique group can, over time, turn you into a good writer. I've seen it happen.

Now, here comes a huge caveat: A lot of the critiques received in writing groups are not helpful. They may mess with your writing voice, or point out things (just to be picky) but that don't need changing, or suggest a plot change you don't like. Overall, I end up accepting about half the suggestions made in my critique group. The best recommendations I have received have given me an "aha" moment. *Why didn't I think of that? Of course, that suggestion makes it read better.* Then, I readily make the suggested change.

You should not change your words unless you agree with the change.

Ultimately, you have to live with what you write and submit for publication. It should be a hundred percent your work, not a mishmash of other people's ideas.

Do all authors want feedback?

Established writers who have no trouble getting published will get feedback from the publisher's editor, although how it is received will depend on many variables, including the author's past experience with the editor, the specific suggestions made, etc. In any case, I doubt

many (any?) established writers bother with critique groups such as I describe in this article. Isaac Asimov, in a book co-authored with his wife, expressed his disdain for critiques.

Certainly *I* don't welcome criticism from any fellow writer, however qualified he might be to offer such comments. Nor do I make much distinction between "constructive criticism" and any other kind. I find no criticism to be constructive . . . nor is there any use in having any writer say, "No, I think you stumbled at this point. What you should really have your character do is thus-and-so."

After all, my mind works in a certain way, and other minds work in other ways. I don't say that my mind-working is better, but it *is* mine. Another's suggestions just doesn't fit my way of thinking.

Naturally, I must listen to editors, and I must even sometimes follow their suggestions...but it would be ridiculous, actually, to invite criticism from someone who is not your editor when you can just as easily refrain from breathing a word about what you're doing.

--Janet Asimov and Isaac Asimov, *How to Enjoy Writing*, Walker & Co., 1987; p. 140

You can't argue this point with Asimov, a genius writer. However, his avoidance of critiques from fellow writers is certainly not recommended for beginning writers, or writers who self-publish, which might describe the majority of active writers across the country.

I've found most writers who plan to self-publish are receptive to critiques, but some are not. Sometimes, people will show up in our critique group for the first time, read a piece that needs a lot of work, receive what I consider a most helpful critique, and never return.

A relative once sent me a short story about his college days. I gave a solid critique, as I would to any member of my club, pointing out some problems with the story and offering suggestions on how to improve it. He was not pleased, as he expected praise, and said I simply didn't appreciate the essence of his piece. On further discussion, he admitted it was a draft, one that he wrote quickly. Yet his inability to accept the critique clashed with his self-perception of being a good writer, even on a first draft. Such hubris is not the path to becoming a better writer.

Unless you're already an established, published writer, join a critique group. It can meet in-person or online. They're everywhere and easy to find. Google "writing critique groups near me." Don't rely only on relatives or close friends to critique your work; they may not be completely honest with you.

For beginners, learning to write has a learning curve, sometimes steep. You have to be open to criticism, willing to rewrite, make changes, and learn about the craft of writing.