

Writing Magazine

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JEN NASH

Corporate Coach, Executive Trainer & Best-Selling Author. 'The Big Power of Little Connections.'

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USA Today and National Best-Selling author with more than 40 Romance novels to date.

Eddie Mann

His near tragedy transformed into popular novels.

The Boy

The first chapter from **SAL CRUZ's** compelling novel.

Nuremberg

a gripping short story by
TONY CONCANNAN

TALES FROM THE SCRIPT

with Script Doc, Lance Thompson

And
Much
More
INSIDE

Helping Writers to Get Published



Writing Magazine



November 2022

You may have noticed a change in our name. We added 'Writing Magazine' to clarify that the goal of this publication is to help writers get published.

Who Are We and What Do We Offer

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Introducing Sal Cruz

In this issue we are happy to introduce author Sal Cruz. His novel "Legend of the Boy" will be released early December in time for Christmas. Read the first chapter as a standalone short story titled "The Boy" in this issue and pre-order his book if you like it. Advance orders get a discounted price which increases upon publication, so don't wait.

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Short story submissions should be made through our website, Submit, tab. Questions about author representation or author services should be directed to luchthibault@altpublish.com or visit AltPublish.com

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SHORT STORY

THE BOY

by Sal Cruz

[Editor's note: This story by acclaimed author Sal Cruz, is the start of a his new novel titled: **"The Legend of the Boy,"** a gripping tale of a young man's turbulent youth, and struggle to survive a conflicted passage to adulthood. If you enjoy it, be sure to read how to pre-order the novel, due out early December, and enter our drawing for some exciting prizes. If you'd like to be a Beta Reader (read an advance copy and offer an honest review) please email your name, email and contact information to editor@booksnpieces.com. Deadline is November 5, 2022. Enjoy!]

In the late summer of 1975, at about ten years old, the course of my life changed forever due to a single occasion when Dad and I were fishing for bream on the Choctaw River in Florida.

Well, Dad was fishing. I was just wetting my hook, as he would say. I was as far removed from angling as some poor sap born in the desert. That's how dad would say it. Or, "You should have been born in the desert, because I have no idea what's wrong with you."

"I just don't know how I can't catch anything," I would say in frustration.

"You don't know how to do much of anything," he said.

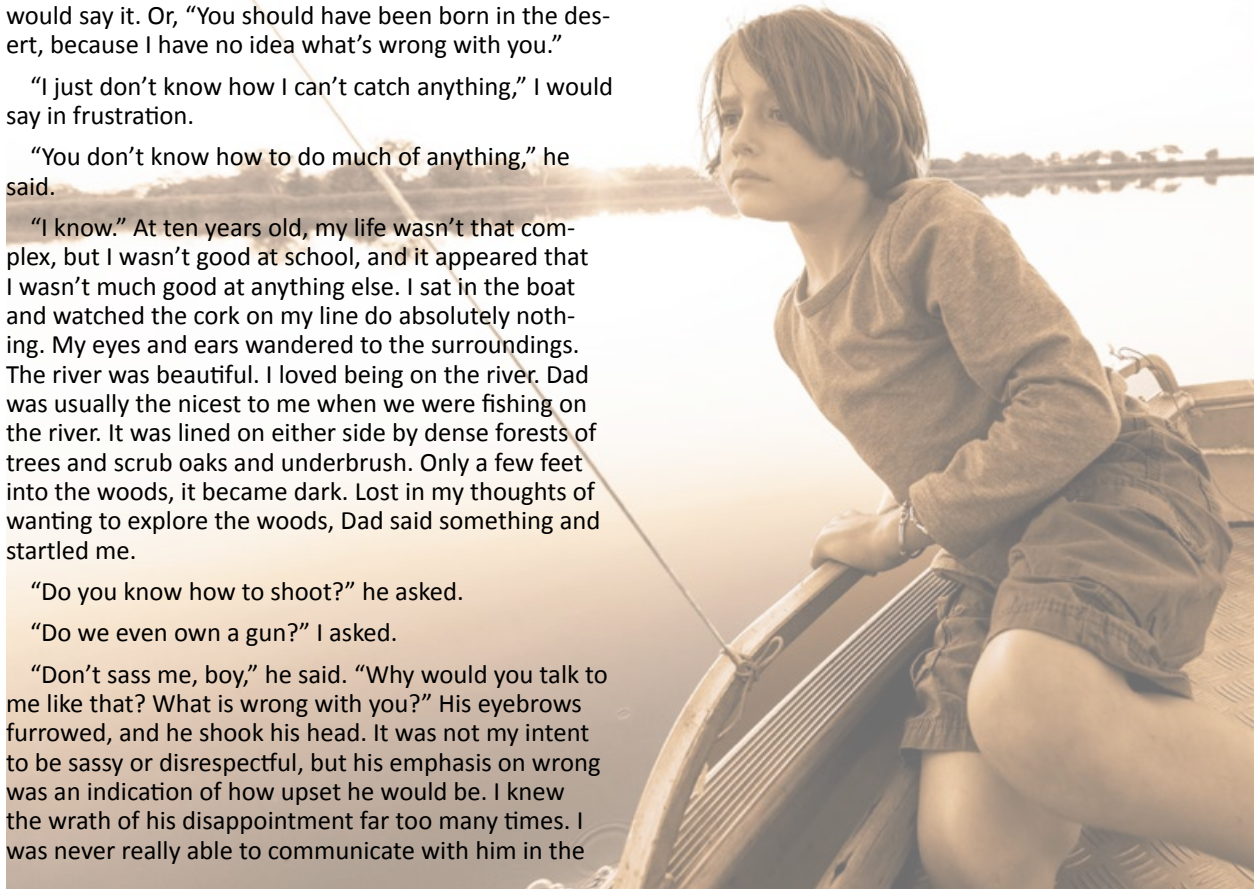
"I know." At ten years old, my life wasn't that complex, but I wasn't good at school, and it appeared that I wasn't much good at anything else. I sat in the boat and watched the cork on my line do absolutely nothing. My eyes and ears wandered to the surroundings. The river was beautiful. I loved being on the river. Dad was usually the nicest to me when we were fishing on the river. It was lined on either side by dense forests of trees and scrub oaks and underbrush. Only a few feet into the woods, it became dark. Lost in my thoughts of wanting to explore the woods, Dad said something and startled me.

"Do you know how to shoot?" he asked.

"Do we even own a gun?" I asked.

"Don't sass me, boy," he said. "Why would you talk to me like that? What is wrong with you?" His eyebrows furrowed, and he shook his head. It was not my intent to be sassy or disrespectful, but his emphasis on wrong was an indication of how upset he would be. I knew the wrath of his disappointment far too many times. I was never really able to communicate with him in the

way I wanted; to talk to him as one adult would talk to another.



Contrary to my fear, he did not continue his berating. Instead, he reached into the cooler, grabbed a beer, and handed it to me.

He started talking to me about this guy he knew, someone he worked with. Dad repaired fuel lines at the naval air station, and this guy he knew had been arrested for drinking and driving. He had been driving drunk but what got him trouble was that he fell asleep at the wheel and his car veered over and hit a car with a woman and her child. This was long before car seats and any realistic expectation of wearing seat belts, so the woman and child had died. I was sad for the woman and her baby, and thought of her husband, how sad he would be. I even felt sorry for this guy Dad knew. What was more amazing was that Dad was telling me a story. He was talking to me. Stories like this were usually reserved for sharing with my uncles. I forgot about the useless cork and listened intently.

Then he told me he had better never catch me behind the wheel with the slightest degree of intoxication or else he would take care of me before the judicial system had any chance to implement punish-

ment, which, in his opinion, would be far too light.

In spite of the warning, I was still in awe. I had never heard him speak in such a way to me or even tell me a story. He was telling me a story about a guy at work. Was it his friend? My mind wandered, wondering what my dad was like at work and then I remembered he was talking. He continued talking about the bad habits of drinking. Drinking and driving was equal to armed robbery in his opinion. He expressed sorrow for his friend and his irrational decision to drink and drive, but sorrow doesn't bring a man's wife and baby back. He said the law was too light on drinking and driving. So, my dad had thought about the husband, too. I liked that we had thought about the same thing.

"Ain't nothing wrong with drinking, like there ain't nothing wrong with shooting the head off a moccasin. But you don't point a gun at no one and you don't drink and drive, pointing a gun at someone, that's just like drinking and driving."

"Now," he said, and he placed his beer and fishing rod down onto the boat, steadied his hand on the rod to make sure the vibration didn't

make it down to the hook so as not to scare the fish (he always had three rods going at the same time and managed all three better than I ever did with just one; the other two were already perfectly balanced against the edge of the boat) and ensuring the rod was steadied against the boat, he carefully opened and reached into the well of the boat with both hands, and managed, not easily, but ever so quietly, to release and pull out a gun.

"This ain't just no gun," he said, somehow knowing what I was thinking.

"This, son, is a semi-automatic .22." This meant absolutely nothing to me.

"Do you even know what that means?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"Boy, I don't know what's wrong with you, but all right, just listen up. First of all, when I ask you a question, you answer it with an answer, not a question."

He was still upset about me asking if we even had a gun. "I knew this guy. He was from New York. This is when we were over in Korea,"-- Dad was in the navy during the Korean



War-- "and this joker would always answer a question with a question. He was some type of smart aleck. Son, you listen. When someone asks you a question, you just answer the question with a sentence, not a question. You understand me?"

"Yes, sir," I said.

"That kid, that smart aleck from New York, no one liked him--he got beat up bad. One time I came back to the barracks from furlough, and it was late, like three in the morning, and he was up, and I said, 'Hey, Baxter, did you have a good week?' and he said, or asked, 'Did you have a good week?' Well, I had enough, and I pulled him off the top bunk there and laid into him. He was eating soup for a week. So you answer right. People don't like people who answer questions with questions. And it didn't help that he was from New York."

"Yes, sir," I said.

"And second, you don't point guns at people. You only point a gun at what you intend to shoot. You understand me?"

"Yes, sir," I said.

"Now, the gun is loaded. You've seen enough John Wayne movies, you know what a gun can do. Now, you see that moccasin over there behind you?" He pointed off the bow of the boat where I sat, and sure enough, there was a moccasin about sixty feet from where I was sitting. I hate water moccasins.

Water moccasins, sometimes called cottonmouths, like to sit on top of the running river and just look at you. They wait for you to turn your head, and then they edge up, waiting to get close enough to attack. I usually had a stick to chase them off when they got close enough.

One time, I poked at a moccasin, and he bit the stick and hung on. Instead of letting go of the stick, I just banged it against the boat, which infuriated Dad because I was scaring off the fish. He kept yelling at me to

let go of the stick, but I didn't want to lose the only stick I had. Finally, Dad yelled loud and long enough that I let the stick go, terrified that the moccasin would enact some type of revenge on me.

Moccasins also like to sit on the high branches of trees and wait for unsuspecting prey--usually us. Many times I would be staring off the bow of the boat when I would hear a thump. I would turn, imagining it was some moccasin wanting to take out his revenge on me for hitting it with a stick. I would sit mortified, but Dad would grab his stick, pick it up and toss it overboard and then tell me how worthless I was. I don't care, I hate moccasins. I hate everything about them, and looking at that cursed thing, I was about ready to pee in my pants. Dad handed the gun to me, and I pointed it offshore, and then I looked at Dad, waiting for instruction.

"Just line up the rear sight with the front sight, then line it up with moccasin's head and pull the trigger," he said. I sat there waiting for more instruction, and he finally said, "For crying out loud, son, go ahead." That was it? Those were my only instructions.

The gun, or rifle, wasn't that heavy. I had always imagined they would be heavy, they seemed heavy in the movies. I held the rifle up as I imagined John Wayne would. I closed my left eye, aimed up the two sights, and moved the gun until the moccasin's head fit into the sights. The moccasin was coasting in the flowing river. It was probably protecting its nest, but it sure seemed like it was staking us out for a kill. I hate moccasins. Hate. Hate. Hate.

I looked at the moccasin long and hard. I wanted to wait for him to open its mouth. The inside of a moccasin's mouth is white, like a ball of cotton, hence the common nickname Cottonmouth. This one was about four feet in length, so a little larger than average. I could hear

my dad talking to me, but I wasn't really paying attention. Usually, when he was teaching me something and I wasn't doing it to his specifications, he would say things like, "Come on, son," which usually came out like, "C'mohn, son," the c barely audible. He could have been saying, "We ain't got all day. We got fish to catch," which I found to be discriminating since I was ineffectual at best at fishing (maybe the moccasins were eating all my fish). He was probably saying, "You are as slow as a grandma, son," which was a typical epithet to me for any task I was working on.

At this point, it did not matter what he was saying. All I knew right then was that if I missed that bugger's head, I wouldn't have a second chance, for one, because the snake would be gone, and two, because Dad would say something like, "Aw, I should have known better than to give a gun to a little panty-waste," or "Ab...so...lute...ly worthless, son, you are absolutely good for nothing." Those were his sentiments most often expressed.

But no matter. I had never shot a rifle, but it was my intent to make my first shot the best shot of my life. I held it steady. The sights were rightly aligned. The snake was in view. Our eyes locked. I could sense that it knew I was there. It lengthened its body and then scrunched, moving closer to me, about a foot. I wanted to smile but did not. I did not want to expose my intent. I wanted the venomous snake to move a little closer so that it would open its mouth in defense, and when it did, I would blow its head right off to smithereens.

I felt a sense of authority holding the gun. I had never held one, had never shot one, but I felt clearly a foot taller. I basked in the superpowers befallen upon me. The snake ever so slightly cocked its head up, looked up into the tall scraggly scrub oaks above us there on the banks of the Choctaw River, and then looked back at me. I did not budge or flinch.

I did not blink. And it again lengthened its body and scrunched and moved a foot closer.

When he cocked his head, I realized at that moment that I would have to make two shots. I would shoot the snake in the river, which I now realized was the mother, not a “he” as I had previously thought, and then, as soon as I shot the mother, the father, who was up in the tree, would fall down either onto me or close enough to attack me. They were working together. She was a sly one. She was a snake. She was giving me confidence. She would get closer to me, then go into the defensive position, I would react, and then her male counterpart would fall from the tree and attack.

I, again, about peed in my pants, thinking of the falling snake.

The male would be five to six feet in length, and about two inches in diameter. For the glory of repetition and in a manner that my dad often spoke of me, I ab...so...lute...ly hate snakes. I heard my dad whispering from behind, but I paid no attention. But the silence between his whisperings was getting shorter. And then I heard a branch snap. And I knew what that was.

Father snake was inching closer to the ends of the branch above us, and his weight was bearing down on the thin branch which caused it to snap a little. My time was short. I told myself that I would wait for her to open her mouth, then count to three and shoot mother snake, stand up, and then turn upward and shoot father snake before it had a chance to fall from the tree.

What I then decided to do was to go ahead and shoot the head off the mother snake before she recoiled into her defensive stance and open her mouth. This would throw off the attack of father snake. That would give me enough time to point the semi-automatic .22 upward, shoot his head off, and hope that it did not fall on me.

One.

Two.

Three.

The rifle did not kick as I thought it would. As it pushed against my shoulder I saw the moccasin’s head explode. I heard the pop of the rifle echo between the trees lining either bank of the river, and simultaneously, I heard the pop of the branch above me, which meant that father snake had been startled by the gun. I quickly stood up in the boat and pointed the gun upward and met the eye of the snake, and pulled the trigger without thought or the blink of an eye.

Again I heard the echo of the rifle and saw the snake’s head explode. His body became erratic as if shocked with a thousand bolts of electricity and I froze because now all that I could think of was that it would fall down on me. Dead or alive, I wanted no snake touching me. The snake’s convulsions caused it to unbalance, and the snake began to fall, but fortunately for me, the snake had twisted its body around the branch so that it did not fall onto me or the boat. It hung in the branch, headless and twitching.

When I felt safe, I started to shake from the tenseness of the moment, the fear of what could have happened. I sat down and put the rifle on my lap, the end pointed toward the shore. I did not move. I heard my dad taking his lines in. I didn’t ask why. He had not said anything

since I sat down, so I was unsure of my situation. Had I done good or not?

I heard him place the first rod down, then the second, then the third. It took him about two minutes to take a line in. I always did like to hear the turning of the reel, the line bouncing against the water. When the line was about the length of the pole, Dad would bring in the hook, hold it with his left hand, and twist the pole with his right hand, securing the line on the pole. He would set the hook on the handle, then lay the pole down. Then he grabbed the next pole. Then I heard the third pole hit the boat. I was still shaking.



“Hand me the rifle, son,” he said to me. I pointed it up and handed it over without looking at him. I heard him put it away without caution for noise or vibrations.

“Hand me your rod,” he said, and I gave it to him. I heard him take in the line, put it with the others, secure them, and then pull in the anchor. He grabbed his oar and steered us down the river toward the dock. He didn’t speak at all. Our drives were usually quiet, but this was unusually quiet. He usually had disparaging remarks about the oth-

er drivers and often spoke as if they could hear him. On this drive, he didn't say anything about or to other drivers. As we got close to the house, he pulled into the IGA grocery store and said, "C'mon." I got out and followed him. I had never been to the grocery store with my dad before. I did not know what to expect.

We went in and went over to the deli, and he opened up the door to the Coca-Cola ice chest.

"Grab what you want," Dad said to me.

I did not counter with disbelief. I reached in and grabbed a Coke. I had only had one Coke in my life, my Uncle 4Z had bought it for me, and I had dreamed of the day I would have another. Mmm, an ice-cold Coke. In reflection, I wish I had known God or things like manna so that I could say something like: "And I reached in and grabbed that Coke as if I were plucking manna from the ground."

Before I even opened the bottle I knew that it would be delicious to the taste. But God was no part of our lives at that point. I did not know God but for an idle word in the Pledge of Allegiance, and I didn't even really know what that meant.

Nevertheless, in my ignorance of God and manna, I did reach for that ice-cold Coke, and I knew that this was going to be a great treat. My dad grabbed a Coke as well. He shut the lid, put his bottle into the bottle opener and popped his open, and then pointed to it and said, "Go ahead." I did not debate or counter. I slipped the head of the bottle into the opener and gently banged my fist against my hand that held the bottle, just as Dad had done, and heard the slight expression of fizz escape and the cap fall into the receptacle below on top of the other caps. And then I heard a slight clink.



I looked up at my dad. He brought his bottle to mine, tapped it against mine, and he said, "Good work, son. Cheers."

He was not smiling, but I was smiling so broadly that I could hardly drink. So, I just rested the head of the glass bottle on top of my bottom lip and poured the Coke into my parched mouth. Man, was that drink good. It was different from all the other drinks that I had ever had. Up until that point in my short and insignificant life, I couldn't even name the last time Dad had bought a soda. That's nothing my dad would have ever wasted money on.

But at this point, on this day, I deserved that Coca-Cola. I had done something special, and I was being rewarded. This was mine. It was mine to enjoy. This reward was like none other. Last year, I had won an award in a field day for the running long jump. It was a blue ribbon with a gold medallion on it. I didn't have it long as a kid named Billy beat me up and took it. But right now, I thought about that ribbon and that fake gold medallion, and I said to myself, "I'm gonna keep this bottle forever."

It's been almost forty years since that day with my dad. And I still have that bottle, it is my only personal memento of him. It was the one physical possession in my life that he personally gave to me. The old bottle has had many purposes in my life. I've used it to launch bottle rockets. It has been filled with the

white sand from the Gulf of Mexico, red sand from the Valley of Fire in Nevada, and brown beach sand from San Diego. It's been a candle stand. I've filled it with gas and lit it. It was in the kids' toy box for years; who knows what all they did with it? I know it was a skyscraper for the longest time sitting in the middle of their little train town, and I remember having to fish it out of the toilet once (no questions asked). And once I saw it in the barn filled with oil. I don't know the story, and again, I never asked. But the old Coke bottle has continued to fill a purpose. One year I saw it cleaned out, and it was sitting on top of the fridge in the barn. One of the kids must have done that. The kids all knew my story with the moccasins; they knew it well. Whenever we were on vacation, usually at the beach, and we were drinking ice-cold Coke, they would ask me to tell the story.

The kids are all on their own now, and the old Coke bottle; old, yes, but still with a bit of its red logo on it. It still sits on top of the fridge in the barn. I still remember the taste of that ice-cold Coke pouring off the lip of the bottle into my dry, parched mouth. I had earned that Coke. And that was pretty darn cool. It was, effectually, my first real reward.

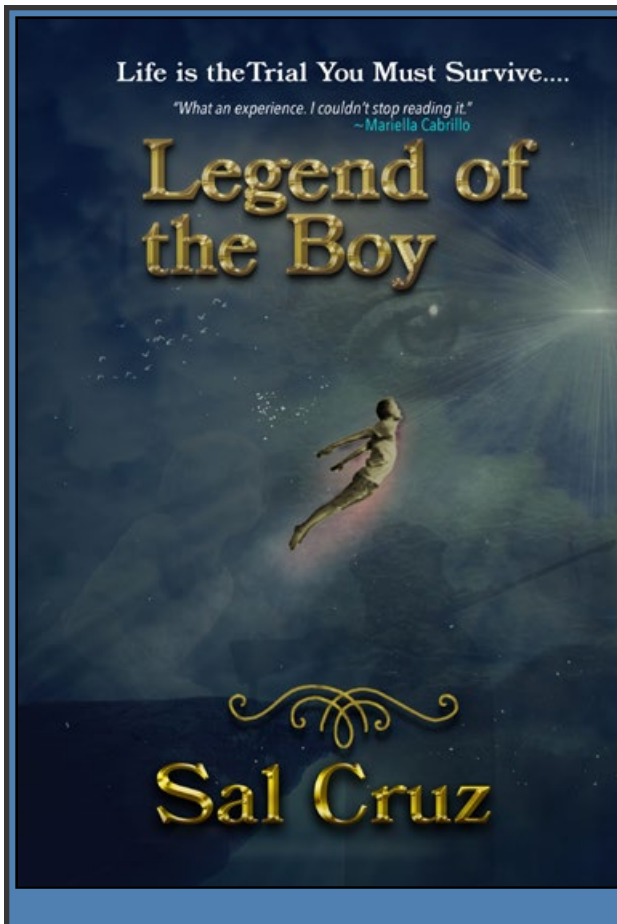
ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Sal Cruz is known among some writer circles as a theo-philosophical author, injecting hard-hitting reality, deeply flawed characters into irresistible stories that grab the

reader. His latest novel, "Legend of the Boy" is due for release December 5 and available for pre-order now. [See page 10].

Sal travels extensively and often writes while visiting family in his native Florida as well as Nevada, California, Idaho and Utah.



PRE-ORDER SPECIAL OFFER:

“Legend of the Boy” by Sal Cruz

will be available for release Dec 5, 2023 as an e-book (all formats), paperback and hardcover.

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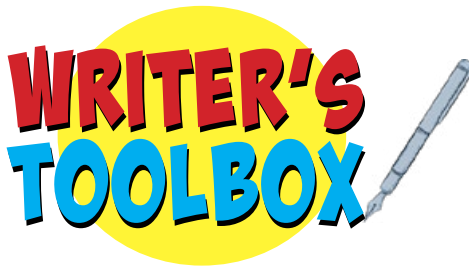
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Give Me ONE Reason Why I Should Care About YOUR STORY?

At the heart of every short story or novel lies the most pressing question of all: Why should the reader care about your story? If they do not care they will not read it, so you must answer this question. What will attract the reader to become emotionally involved?

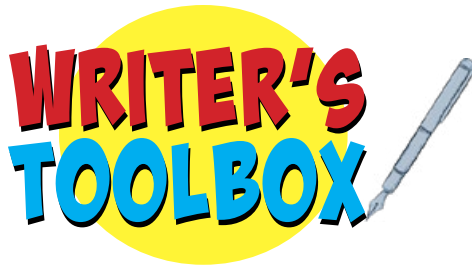
This is not as easy a question as you might think. While a good storyline might help, and interesting characters might pique their interest, your work must have something stronger than that. Remember that nothing is unique; it's all been done

before in one form or another. What changes is the presentation, your choice of words—you often hear readers describe how a book read—or the manner in which you present them.

Reading a short story or a novel is an escape for the reader. Don't bog them down with complex language or convoluted ideas that they may not understand. If the reader has to keep stopping to go back and try to decipher your intention, you've likely lost a reader right there.

As a writer and a reader, I see stories everyday. The ones that compel me have an ingredient I find attractive. This could be the tone, the theme, the twists, subtle undertones from a character back story, or something I can directly relate to. Rarely do I feel compelled to read a story because it was cleverly assembled, although that is another element.

Before you sign off on your finished story, go over it and ask the big question: Why will the reader care about this story.



Write from Instinct

How your sentence structure should change with your emotions

Many people assume that writing is simply an exercise. Sit down, grab paper and pen, or word processing device, come up with an idea et voila—InstaHit!

The ability to write fast, or voluminously is not a guarantee that what you write is any good. While it is certainly an achievement to write a lot, there is more to writing well.

Let me give you an example. You listen to music. A selection you like. You close your eyes and fall into the music. Now you are no longer just listening; you are immersed emotionally. You notice nuances; guitar licks, slight turn of a musical phrase and how well it works.

When you write, the same thing needs to happen. You write it out. You read it back. But you are reading it as a writer cum editor. You are not reading it as a reader. Readers reviewing books they love almost always talk about the flow, how the story grabbed them, how the characters spoke to them, how it felt like being on a ride with the author. These sentiments transcend the piece being just 'good writing.' It passes into an area that is seldom taught, a skill that you acquire only when you read a lot—not just your writing, but lots of different works. It is. variation of the skill of reading.

When you are finished writing the structure of the story, and put the draft away for a time so it is fresher when you reread it, you are now able to come back and study it for flow, feel, fluency.

Your writing style, which will take some time to fully develop, is not clouding it. What you must do is read it as though you were watching it as a film. Ask questions like: How can I make this part jump out? What can my character do or say that I need to adjust.

Let's play with a sentence and see what we can do.

Margot walked into the living room and sat in the chair by the window overlooking the ocean.

[I know nothing of Margot, the scene, why she is there, what she looks like, where we are and so on. Let me expand on this.]

She hadn't bothered to put on makeup. With her left hand across her chest, Margot shuffled into the living room, pausing only to catch her breath, her hand now against the stone counters she loved, as though somehow the weight might be lifted from her.

With a breath she let go and moved forward, around the oak table behind the couch, and toward the huge bay win-

dows overlooking the ocean.

Pulling back the velvet work chair she often used, she sat down allowing her weight to spill over the sides.

The cresting waves caught her attention and for a moment she was distracted from what was bothering her as she followed the swells, rising ever higher toward the shore before cresting and breaking, a line of white froth marking the boundary.

[Not only have I increased the word count, I have included lots of information about Margot and where she is. We know she is a larger person, has something that is also weighing her down. And while we do not have a lot of details, we do have a picture. I could now add some other elements that allow the reader to feel emotions.]

It had only been a month since the funeral. She could still hear his laughter. A larger wave crashed, and she stared into it. The green and blue hues of the swirling water blended with images of him on the beach, his small body erratically running from the waves as they approached, skittish like a cat, one moment walking slowly then suddenly leaping into the air to dodge the incoming water. His skin was tanned, specks of sand stuck to the fine hairs across his chest and shoulders. His wet brown hair was all over the place, also with sand stuck to it.

"Look," he shouted at her. "Look what I found." He was holding up a starfish shell, its rigid five limbs perfectly intact.

"That's nice," she shouted back. "Eric, be careful," but he had already run off away from her.

From the chair she let out a deep sigh. She wanted to be with him. He was too young to be taken from me, she silently screamed out. There was nothing left for her now. She could go out on the balcony and take the wrought iron spiral stairs to the beach below. From there it would be a handful of short steps to the waters edge. She knew she would not wait for the tide to come in; she would stride out into the water, push herself slowly closer to the waves. She could feel the pull of the tide wanting to drag her farther out. If she stopped fighting it would easily take her. She could hold her breath until she was past the hope of any rescue. By then, she knew, the tide would have pulled her far enough away that it would all end quickly. Eric, she thought, are you waiting for mummy?"

You now have a full picture of Margot. Did you feel the story as you progressed toward the end?

Are you wanting more? That is the reaction you want!

A CONVERSATION WITH...

Eddie Mann

They say that when life gives you lemons... well, you know the rest. Eddie Mann is an excellent example of taking the adversity of life and transforming it into something positive, productive, and in his case, successful. If you're looking for an inspirational story, we're pleased to offer this interview with Eddie Mann

B&P: You started writing, as a form of therapy about 7 years ago. Could you tell us how that came about and what writing was a good choice for you?

EM: About 7 years ago I suffered a mental breakdown, well to be honest a complete meltdown. I don't remember much about it; most of my memories are from what my wife told me once I emerged from whatever place my mind had taken me. Apparently, I was minutes away from being sectioned and admitted to a mental health facility, that very conversation was taking place between two doctors right in front of me but I don't remember a thing about it.

The journey to start writing came out of a conversation with a member of the NHS Crisis Team, who worked with me and supported me over many weeks. One of them suggested a start to write down my feelings, like a mental health journal. My immediate reaction was, "I'm a bloke; I don't write a diary." Days later I told my wife that I was going to fulfill a dream that I had held on to for many years and

write a novel. That was the point when 'Ordinarily Unthinkable' was born—from the very beginning that was its title and despite its flaws I am very proud of it. The writing process took my mind away from some dark places and thoughts. It was almost like I took all those terrible thoughts and transferred them from my mind to my laptop. It sounds a bit dramatic, but that book saved my life.

B&P: 'Ordinarily Unthinkable' is your first novel. Could you tell us about it?

EM: 'Ordinarily Unthinkable' is a dark, violent story about a man who has lost everything. I wrote the main character as a flawed individual with weaknesses, I didn't want him to become some kind of hero, and in fact, he ended up becoming a kind of anti-hero.

He embarks on a journey of revenge,—a truly, violent revenge—during which the people who help him also end up being hurt. The main character, Grant, was a reflection of how I felt at the time I wrote the story so it was always

going to become a very dark and twisted tale.

It was always intended to be a one-off, so much so that I effectively killed off the main character. There was no way that I was going to let someone who committed so much terrible violence get away with it, the problem was that I got so much feedback from people who read the book asking when the next book would be released. I almost felt obliged to write a second book and came up with a way of bringing Grant back from the brink of death. I am very grateful to those who wanted a second book because it allowed me to write another three books (so far) and further develop the character that so many people have come to love.

B&P: How did you publish it and what was the response?

EM: I self-published 'Ordinarily Unthinkable,' without really knowing anything about self-publishing, and the end product was a reflection of that. It was, in my opinion, terrible...full of typos and grammatically awful.

At the same time as self-publishing, I was sending the manuscript to lots of publishing houses, including the 'big 5,' and received lots of rejection letters giving many different reasons for rejecting it. Then a letter from a publisher I had never heard of arrived through the letterbox, offering me a publishing contract. Only after reading the letter and offer several times did I realize that they expected me to 'contribute' to the publishing process. They were asking for a great deal of money that I could not really afford, however, my wife convinced me that I deserved to see my work published correctly, so I signed the contract and sent off the money.

I now realize that this was a 'vanity publisher,' and many of the promises made in the contract were never met. However, at the time, I wanted my book to hit the world with a storm. It ended up sort of hitting the world in a small thunderstorm, but having said that, I am glad I did it.

I learned a great deal about the process of publishing, not through the publishers, but through my research. I would never use a vanity publisher again, but I can see why people do I would never advise people against it, but I would ask them to structure their expectations.

The end product was a good quality, but the publisher did little if any marketing like they said they would do. This just drove me on to do my own and with nothing else but dogged determination I ended up having a book

launch at Waterstones in Milton Keynes, interviews with three local newspapers, and with BBC Radio Northampton.

The response was that I sold quite a good number of copies, and it continues to sell. The more satisfying end result was the messages I got from people telling me how much they enjoyed my book, some from people I knew, but most from people I did not know.

B&P: What's your writing style like? Your day?

EM: When I first started to write I had plenty of time on my hands as I was not working, having been signed off because of my mental health problems. Back then I tended to write during the late hours of the night into the wee hours of the morning, get a couple of hours of sleep and then spend the daylight hours formulating storylines and ideas in my head. I wrote 'Ordinarily Unthinkable' in just 4 months, a period that my wife likes to call her 'author widow' period.

These days I am back to full-time working, I am a department manager with the NHS, so writing has to take second stage to what is a very time-consuming and demanding job. I now tend to write when I get the opportunity, and this has really slowed down the progress, something I don't like, but have to accept. I hope to be able to retire in a few short years and when that happens, and I have my time back again, watch out, world!



B&P: How far removed from the past events are you and how do you feel looking back?

EM: I don't like to call what happened past events, as I still live with them. I was diagnosed with depression and anxiety, which was sort of correct, but they were the outcomes of the real problem which was not realized until about 3 years ago. Following lots of therapy (at this point I should probably apologize to some of those who were trying to help me as I think I broke a couple of them), and speaking with doctors and consultants, support groups...oh the list goes on...I was finally diagnosed with PTSD.

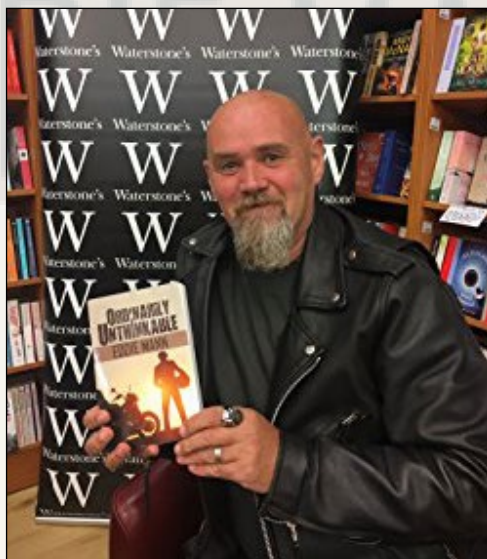
I had served 12 years in the Army and 25 years in the Prison Service, during which time I had witnessed many horrific things. My GP summed it up perfectly when she said, "You have been filling the bath up for many years and not bothered to ever remove the plug. You then put a lid over the bath in the hope of keeping the water in...the bath eventually exploded because of the pressure you put it under." I love my GP; she is very straight with me, especially when she added to her deep analogy with... "basically you have been bloody stupid, it's time to start opening up and talking to people.

I now talk about mental health and its effects whenever I am given the opportunity. I tried to take my life on two occasions. If I can stop one person from trying to do that then I will leave this life a happy man.

B&P: You've written four books and working on the fifth. Is the subject the same, is it a series or stand alone books?

EM: The four books I have written are a series of books about the main character, Grant, and the fifth book that I am currently working on is the next in that series. Readers have said that they are quite easy

to read as stand-alone books, but personally, I think the best reading experience is to read them in sequence and get to know the main character. Go on the journey with him, and I think you will understand him better.



B&P: How has your life changed?

EM: I don't think my life has changed at all. I haven't earned fame and fortune from my writing, in fact it has probably cost me more than I have received in royalties, but I have gained better riches than money. I have learned a great deal about myself, I have achieved a lifelong ambition to publish a book, and most importantly, throughout this seven-year journey, I have discovered who my true friends are.

The biggest impact of writing on my life is that I am still here. I get up every morning and try my best in whatever I am doing, I try to improve my writing each time I open my laptop and I talk to people. That is probably the biggest change in my life, I spent many years as an angry, anti-social man who totally refused to talk about himself, whereas now I am confident being interviewed on a radio show and talking openly about myself and my

battles with depression and PTSD. My wife would probably agree and then add that I am still a bit of a grumpy old git, though.

B&P: Any advice for new writers setting out? Things you wish you had known earlier?

EM: Believe in yourself, write for yourself and nobody else, and above everything else, never give up. You will probably never become a rich and famous author earning millions from your books, but if that is why you started to write you may need to have a rethink.

I wish I had known more about publishing and editing when I started to write, but I think new writers just want to see their ideas turned into words...I know that I did.

B&P: Hardest part about writing?

EM: The hardest part of writing!! There are so many difficult parts to writing, and I am sure they are different depending on the genre. However, for me, there are three difficult areas:

Making the story believable but still interesting for the readers.

Accepting that sometimes you are just not in the right frame of mind to write, even when your brain is brimming with ideas.

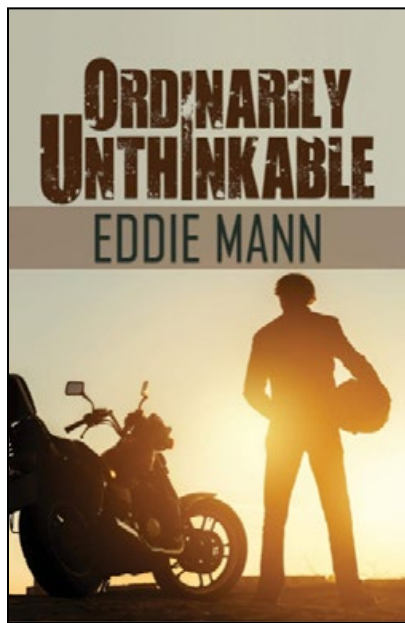
And finally, reading through your finished work before sending your manuscript to your editor. I don't know about other writers, but I absolutely hate reading my own work!

B&P: What's coming up for you?

EM: Well, I need to finish off my latest book, I am about two-thirds through it, and it has a title. I will get there, but I am not going to rush the process. Then I am going to take a break from 'Grant and move on

to writing a new series of books. I have a great character in my head and what I think is a great story. This may also lead to another series of books, but these will definitely be easily read as stand-alone stories. I have learned a huge amount about the writing process, and I am very grateful to Grant for accompanying me through this literary journey and allowing me to use him as a kind of guinea pig.

Excerpt from Chapter One of 'Ordinarily



'Unthinkable' by Eddie Mann

"Remove your helmet, sir," said the cop, casually raising the first finger of his right hand, indicating to his colleague that he would like him to join him now.

The biker noticed the cop's attempt to secretly summon his colleague, but nothing much passed the attention of this individual. He lifted his visor fully open, showing nothing more of his facial features. The cop looked at his face, or should I say he looked at a protective half-mask with the pattern of a skull's jaw printed upon it. The rider's eyes still could not be seen courtesy of a set of internal

sun shades that were fully lowered, protecting the rider's eyes from the sun and whatever else wanted to look into them.

The cop did not respond to the request for the helmet to be removed, being ignored at first, instead saying, "Do you know why we stopped you, sir?"

The biker smiled unseen beneath the half-face mask, but it caused just enough movement to cause the deathly smile of bones and teeth to appear on the print. "Now, officer, if I knew that, it would be standing there in that smart uniform and you sitting on this bike sweating your goddamned ass off, wouldn't it?"

The police officer did not smile or react in any way. Still, the biker continued, "Or are you one of those old retired cops who has come back to them patrols where you play the part of the helpful side of the law and warn people of a broken brake light or to give me directions, cuz if you are that is really useful because I think I am on the brink of being lost."

With his colleague having now arrived and placed himself about 4 feet behind the first policeman, he maybe gained a bit more confidence as they now outnumbered the biker, or maybe he just wanted to show off in front of him; the older cop repeated himself a little more forcefully than before.

"I told you to remove your helmet, lad."

Slowly removing one short black leather summer glove after another and placing them onto the bike seat, the rider casually removed his helmet, followed by the skull face protector, placing the latter onto the former.

Both coppers were now looking at the bald rider, eyes nearly half-closed, that sat above a short button nose and graying goatee beard. Nothing special or out of the ordinary here, thought the young officer, just another greasy old biker

with nothing in his life other than the bike he rode. He was pretty accurate with his second thought.

"Where you traveling to?" asked the older, portly cop.

"Was hoping to find hell so I could then go back," said the rider smiling, "you going anywhere, nice officer?"

"Name," demanded the officer, becoming totally pissed off with this smartass wanker.

"Difficult question, officer, you could be named anything, but I think you look like a George!"

"Your fucking name, smartarse." The cop's voice was now raised and obviously more irate.

"Well, I do apologize, a slight breakdown in communication there. My name is Grant; what's yours?" said the biker, offering his right hand to be shaken

"Well Grant, my name is Sgt. Murphy. Do you have a driving license or did you lose that along with your last name?"

Grant started to unzip his bike jacket when Sgt. Murphy said, "Careful there, boy, nice and slowly."

He continued to unzip his jacket reaching into the inside pocket and pulling out his wallet.

"Easy yourself, Mr. Murphy. This is Shropshire, not New York."

BUY 'Ordinarily Unthinkable' from AMAZON:

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A CONVERSATION WITH...

ANNA J. STEWART

Anna J. Stewart is a USA Today and national bestselling author who writes sweet to sexy romance for Harlequin's Heartwarming and Romantic Suspense lines as well as ARC Manor. To date she has written over 40 published novels.

B&P: You've published over forty romances, starting in 2014. Do you feel that writing has become easier?

AJS: Oh, I wish I could say that, but no, not really. It still all comes down to getting each word on the page and there are days it just feels like a struggle. I think I've gotten better at how to put a story together, the necessary elements that make for a compelling read, and wrong turns, but I wouldn't say it gets easier. Maybe more streamlined, LOL.

B&P: What's your process like? Are you rigid or fluidic in your approach?

AJS: I don't tend to plot (beyond that which I've put in my proposals in order to sell the book), so I'm fluid in that I'm never entirely sure how we'll get to the happily ever after. I write chronologically, from page one straight through. I don't have that talent of writing the scenes as they come and then plugging them in. Nope. I'm a Chapter One and go kind of writer and I try

to sit down at the same time every day. Writing is, after all, my job, so in that way I do try to be rigid (doesn't always work though).

B&P: What is the best and worst parts of writing?

AJS: The best part is creating something out of a germ of an idea and building the story and characters from the ground up. There's a particular rush that comes with that, especially as I get toward the end of a book. As far as the worst? When you know you've gone wrong somewhere and it's going to take deleting a huge chunk or rewriting a big portion of the story. But I'd rather do that than have to rewrite it months down the line. It's a gut punch when I have to hit delete, but when I do, I know it will make the story better.

B&P: Your early 'obsessions' were *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, and *Wonder Woman*, all of which are active in 2022. Why romance?

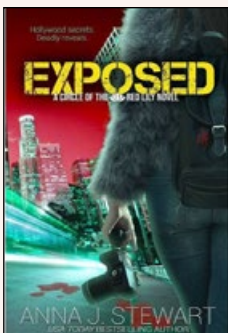
AJS: That's a good question. I've always been a voracious reader and didn't start out reading romance. I was a thriller and horror fan long before I picked up my first romance. But there's something special about two characters who grow and change in order to find a future with each other that has just always appealed. Maybe it's my love of Disney



fairy tales that aids in that as well, not really sure. But in each of those aforementioned obsessions, there's romance in there. It's what most people spend their lives looking for, right? Their person? So yeah. That's why romance. It truly is all about the human condition.

B&P: Some recent releases include *'Thankfully In Love,'* *'A Second Chance for Love,'* to name a few, which are collaborative works with three other authors. Was it more difficult to coordinate with other authors when writing your novella, or does it make the process easier?

AJS: I've been pretty fortunate that I tend to work with the same authors. My first published romance was as part of an anthology, so it's just always been part of what I do. I like the collaboration process and it helps knowing that readers enjoy interconnected stories. These days working together is made pretty easy with Zoom and other online platforms. I think the trick is finding





authors you work well with. Again, that's where I've been really lucky. The fun outweighs the potential stress of the process. Being an author is normally such a solitary process. Opening up to collaborations is a necessary breath of fresh air sometimes.

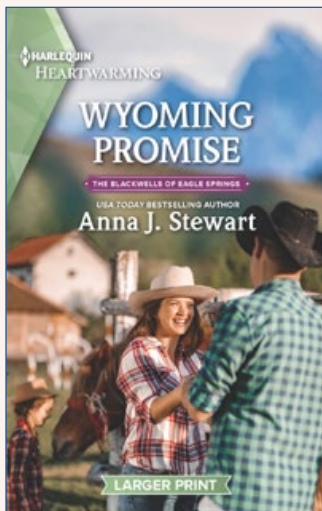
B&P: What is upcoming for you?

AJS: EXPOSED, the first of my Circle of the Red Lily romantic suspense series is out on November 15th and I am so excited about this release. I feel like this is the book that really showcases my voice and embraces who I am as a storyteller. There will be four more in the series and I am

amped to get back to them—I start book 2 next month. And then in February I have my latest romantic suspense with Harlequin, THE PI'S DEADLY CHARADE, which continues the Honor Bound series. I got to blow stuff up in this book and that's always fun, LOL. Then I'll be heading to Hawai'i for the first in my Island Reunions series for Heartwarming (sweet romances). A lot happening for sure!

B&P: Any advice for newer authors?

AJS: Read. Read read read and write. The best way to learn is to do. Nothing is going to be perfect the first time you get the words on the screen, so you keep going and you figure it out as you go. If you're getting words down, you're writing. But perhaps most importantly, never let anyone (author, reader, family member) ever convince you that what you are doing is not worthy of attention or that it's not important. We need storytellers now more than ever, all kinds of stories. No one genre is more important than the other, nor is one more deserving of accolades and readership. We need YOUR stories. Whatever you are writing, you are worthy. Don't ever forget it.



Find Anna at:

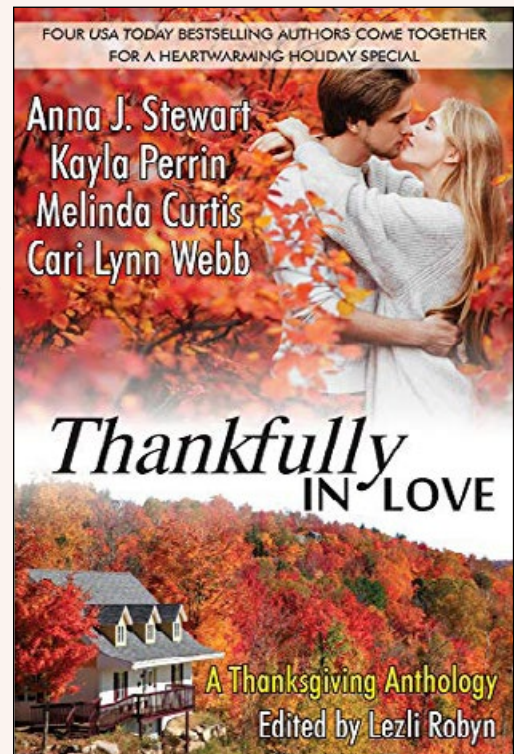
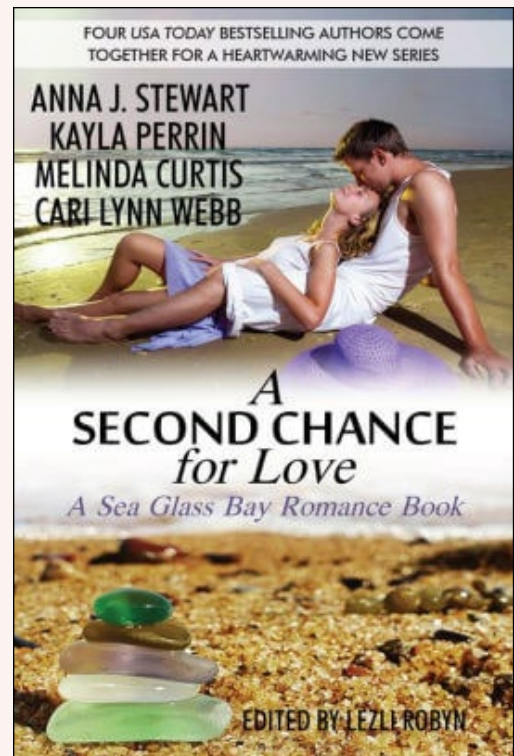
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SHORT STORY

NUREMBERG

by Tony Concannon

It started when Sandy and I ran into Mrs. Shepherd and her children at the library. We'd come directly from school and we were still wearing our uniforms. Mrs. Shepherd was smiling at us but I couldn't bring myself to say anything.

"How old are your children, Mrs. Shepherd?" Sandy asked. Both of the children had Mrs. Shepherd's blond hair.

"Five and three."

"They're so cute."

Mrs. Shepherd looked at me. "Hi, Patrick."

"Hi."

She seemed to understand my discomfort. She said goodbye. I watched her walk away with her children. She was wearing sneakers and tight blue jeans.

"She's beautiful," Sandy said.

"Imagine if Sister Bernadine caught us."

"We'd be saying Hail Marys every afternoon."

It was the beginning of June and the school year was almost over. In April Mrs. Shepherd had taken over our 8th grade class when Sister Bernadine had become ill and she was the first lay teacher in the history of the Catholic school.

Sandy was thumbing through a fashion magazine. She always wore her hair in pigtails. When we'd gotten to the library, she'd put on pink lipstick. At school the girls weren't allowed to wear makeup. I had "Sport," open in front of me but I couldn't concentrate.

"Do you want to see the library ghost?" Sandy asked.

"What's it look like?" My mouth went dry as I spoke. Seeing the library ghost was what you said when you wanted to make out.

"I'm not going to tell you. Let's go."

We stood and I followed her past the circulation desk and up a long

corridor to a room at the end. A sign said, "Biography."

"I'm scared," I joked as we entered the room. The lights were dimmer. She took my hand and led me between the racks of books. Her fingers were small and slender. The day before we'd held hands for the first time. We reached the back wall and she took me behind the rack.

"Where's the ghost?" I asked

"You have to close your eyes or it won't come out."

I closed them. When I opened them, her face was moving toward mine. I closed my eyes again and moved my lips to meet hers. They were thin and her lipstick tasted like wax. She put her hands on my shoulders.

Later, I walked her home as far as the top of the hill. I'd walked her to there the last three days. She lived at the bottom, across the street from the playground.

"Walk me to the bottom today," she said.

"Your father and mother might see us."

"I don't care."

"That's my house," she said when we reached the bottom. "The light green one."

"Which one is your room?"

"You can't see it. It's at the back. See you tomorrow."

We touched hands and she crossed the street. I wiped my mouth with my hand to remove any lipstick.

My mother was in the kitchen when I got home.

"Where were you?" she asked.

"I went to the library."

"I never saw you go to the library so much."

"I had to look up some things for school."

I went into the living room and picked up the telephone book. There was only one Shepherd in town. Her husband's name was Robert. They lived on Church Street.

Mrs. Shepherd was wearing a red skirt, just above her knees. It was Friday afternoon. She was recording grades in the black marking book all of the teachers used. Every few moments she glanced up to make sure no one was cheating on the math test. I'd already finished and turned over my paper. I always got the highest marks in math and science. I was one of the tallest boys and my seat was in the back right corner. Sandy sat halfway up on the left side. She was writing with her head bent and her pigtails hung straight down. She was an average student and she didn't take school seriously.

My eyes met Mrs. Shepherd's and she smiled at me. It had been three days since she'd seen Sandy and me at the library and she hadn't said a word about it. I slumped in my seat and stretched my legs. I was too big for the desks and chairs, which were bolted to the floor. Sister Bernadine would never have let me sit like that; students, especially boys, were supposed to sit straight up, their feet under their desks, their hands folded on top, I stared at Mrs. Shepherd. She was the most beautiful woman I knew. School would be over in two weeks and I

wouldn't see her again.

After school I rode my bike past her house. It was a large yellow house. A man was working in the garage. I turned around and came back down the street. I didn't see her.

That evening Sandy called me. My mother answered.

"It's some girl," she said.

I took the phone out into the hall so my parents couldn't listen.

"Are you mad at me or something?" Sandy asked.

"No."

"I thought you were mad or something because you went right home without saying anything."

"I had to do something."

"My little sister found your ID bracelet."

"Did she tell your mother?"

"I don't think so. I don't care.

Do you want to meet somewhere tomorrow afternoon?"

I could hear her breathing.

"Where?" I asked.

"How about Morrow Park?"

"Okay."

"What are you doing now?" she asked.

"Nothing. I was reading a book. What are you doing?"

"We were playing parcheesi with my father. I don't think your mother likes me calling. She didn't sound friendly."

"Do your mother and father mind you calling?"

"No but I'm calling from the extension upstairs. I don't like them listening."

"Who was that?" my mother asked when I got off the phone.

"Some girl at school."

"What's her name?" my father asked.

"Sandy."

I sat back on the couch and picked up my book. I couldn't stop thinking about Mrs. Shepherd.

* * *

On Saturday I rode my bike past her house. I didn't see her. By the time I got to the park I was late and Sandy was waiting for me by the third base stands. She was wearing

shorts and a sleeveless top. She'd undone her pigtails and combed her hair straight down. It had rained earlier in the morning and I put my hand on the one of the seats.

"It's too wet to sit," I said.

"Do you want to walk down to Howard Johnson's on the highway?"

"Okay."

"There's a shortcut."

The shortcut took us through a field with tall reeds. Sandy held my hand.

"I told my mother and father about you about you," she said.

"Why did you do that?"

"I wanted to."

The field went up to the back of a gas station. We walked through it to the highway. The attendant, a young man, saw us but didn't say anything.

At Howard Johnson's we bought ice cream cones and took them to one of the tables.

"You don't like my hair like this, do you?" Sandy asked.

"It's okay."

She made a face. "My father didn't like it, either."

We held hands again as we walked back.

"We used to play hide and seek in here when we were little kids," Sandy said when we were going through the field. "I didn't like it because there were snakes."

"There's one now."

She jumped away. She pushed me when she saw I'd been kidding. She took hold of my elbow and pulled me closer.

"I want to look at that tree," she said.

At the tree she turned and kissed me. I moved her back against the tree and the wet bark broke off under my hand. I could feel the eyes of the houses. I pulled back from her.

"This is a bad place," I said.

She kissed me again on the lips.

When we were back on the path, I brushed bits of bark from her hair and clothes. My jeans were wet from walking through the reeds.

* * *

On Monday Mrs. Shepherd had on a light blue dress. The materi-



al was thin and the shape of her breasts was unmistakable.

"Does anyone know what happened at Nuremberg?" she asked.

The name had come up in a story we'd been reading. Michael Cotter raised his hand.

"Michael."

"Isn't that where they had the war trials?"

"That's right. After the war there were trials for the men who had started the war or committed atrocities."

"That was very good, Michael," Mrs. Shepherd went on. "Some of you, especially Michael and Mary O'Neil, have very good general knowledge. It comes from reading a lot. I think having general knowledge is sometimes more important than getting the highest marks on tests."

I ran out of the classroom when the bell rang. I went straight to the library and read the section on Nuremberg in the encyclopedia. I was jealous. I was smarter than Michael Cotter. When I got home, I changed out of my uniform and got my bike. I rode it past Mrs. Shepherd's house. I didn't see her. I went all the way to the end of the long street and turned back. I was coming down the hill before her house when I saw her playing with her children in the front yard. She waved to me and I stopped.

"I didn't know you lived around here, Patrick."

"I don't. I live on Lydon Street. I went to my friend's house but he wasn't home. He goes to public school."

I wondered if she could tell I was lying.

"Some of the Germans were executed at Nuremberg," I said.

"That's right."

She waited for me to say something more.

"I'll see you tomorrow, Mrs. Shepherd."

"Goodbye, Patrick."

It was the second to last week of school. Every day I went straight

home after school and rode my bike by Mrs. Shepherd's house. I didn't see her again. Each afternoon at school there was a final exam. The student with the highest grade in each subject would receive a medal at graduation. On Friday was history.

I checked my answers twice before I turned over my paper. Michael Cotter, his head down, was still writing. Sandy had her hair in pigtails again. Mrs. Shepherd was looking out over the class.

When school finished, I lingered outside the building. Sandy had already left. I wanted to ask Mrs. Shepherd the answer to one of the questions.

I went back inside. Mrs. Shepherd wasn't in her classroom but her bag was on the desk. The exam papers were there as well. Michael Cotter's was on top. I walked over to the door and checked the corridor. No one was coming. I hurried back to the desk and picked up a pencil. Listening for footsteps, I changed several of Michael's answers. I tried to make my circles the same as his. I checked the corridor again. No one was coming and I walked down it and out the back door of the school. As I came around the side of the building, I saw Mary O'Neil go in the front door.

Sandy called me on Saturday morning.

"Why didn't you talk to me at school all week?" she asked.

"I was busy."

"What are you doing today?" she asked.

"Nothing special."

"Do you want to meet at Morrow Park?"

"What time?" I asked.

"One o'clock?"

"Okay."

I hung up the phone and got on my bike. I rode past Mrs. Shepherd's house but I didn't see her. I went all the way to the end of the street and turned around. I rode slowly past the house again but I didn't see her. I thought about her all the time. I couldn't stop.

Sandy was waiting when I arrived at the park.

"You're always late," she said.

"Sorry. What do you want to do?"

"Want to come over my house?"

"Not if your mother and father are home. Why don't we walk down to Howard Johnson's?"

"I guess."

Neither of us spoke as we walked through the field. The same man was working at the gas station. We ate our ice cream cones at one of the tables again.

"Aren't you going to say anything today?" I said.

"You never say anything. You never talk to me."

"I'm not a big talker."

When we were passing the tree on the way back, I pulled her toward it and bent my head to kiss her. She turned her head away. Back on the path I took her hand but she yanked it away.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"I don't know. I don't want to kiss you now. I don't want to hold your hand."

"Don't you like me anymore?"

"I don't know." She started crying.

Neither of us spoke again until we reached the park.

"Goodbye," she said and I watched her walk away.

Tuesday was the last day of school. In the morning Mary O'Neil was called down to the principal's office. When she came back, her face was red and her eyes puffy, as though she'd been crying. Mrs. Shepherd had said we could have a small party the final hour and there was soda, cookies, and potato chips for everyone. I kept looking at her. She was talking with Michael Cotter.

When the bell rang there was a loud cheer. Sandy came around to my seat and handed me my ID bracelet. I put it into my pocket. Neither of us said anything. I'd bought it to give to her and it had cost me four dollars.

As I was leaving the classroom, I glanced at Mrs. Shepherd. She was still talking with Michael Cotter.

* * *

Graduation was the following evening in the church. Mrs. Shepherd sat with all the nuns. Mary O’Neil was absent and everyone was whispering she’d been caught changing the answers on Michael Cotter’s history exam. I got the medals for mathematics and science. Michael Cotter got the one for English. Then the bishop announced Michael had won the medal for history. Mrs. Shepherd smiled at him as he came down the altar steps with his medal.

* * *

The following day I rode my bike by her house. I didn’t see her. I rode by it the next day. And the day after that. And the day after that. I rode by her house every day, sometimes more than once. Occasionally she was in the backyard with her children but she didn’t notice me. One afternoon her husband was working in the front yard and he stared at me.

It was near the end of August when I finally saw her pulling weeds from the flower bed in the front yard. She was by herself and her back was to me. I stopped my bike.

“Hi, Mrs. Shepherd,” I called.
She stood and turned to face me.
“Hi, Patrick. How are you?”
“Good.”

The weeds still in her hand, she walked toward me.
“Are you ready for high school?” she asked.
“I guess.”

I glanced down at the ground. Then I raised my head. “I’m the one who changed the answers on Michael Cotter’s test. It wasn’t Mary O’Neil.”

She looked at me before she spoke. “Why did you do it?” she asked.

“I thought you liked Michael better than me.”
“Don’t ever ride your bike past here again.” She turned and walked back toward the flower bed.

I rode slowly away. At the corner I stopped and looked back. She was gone. It was over. I could stop thinking of her.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Tony Concannon grew up in Massachusetts. After graduating from college with a degree in English and American Literature, he taught for the next 18 years in Japan, where

many of his stories are set. Since returning to the United States, he has worked with adults with developmental and intellectual disabilities, an occupation he finds both enjoyable and rewarding.

He began writing in 1979 and his work has appeared in Columbia Journal, On the Premises,

Litro, The Taproot Literary Review, and Thema. He has always been an avid reader, mostly of fiction, history, and biography. Recent favorite authors include Elizabeth Strout and Nicole Krauss.

Although he no longer plays basketball, he still runs to stay in shape. He is the proud father of two sons and he divides his time between Massachusetts and Vancouver, Canada.



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TALES FROM THE SCRIPT

Observations and Opinions on Screenwriting by
script doctor LANCE THOMPSON

TAKING NOTES

Prior to production, any time a screenwriter hands a script over to some one, he or she is implicitly asking for feedback. “Let me know what you think” is the unstated request that goes along with asking some one to take the time to read the work. The feedback from the reader is what we usually refer to as “notes.”

The writer may not find the notes helpful, insightful, encouraging, or valuable in any way. Nevertheless, the writer must acknowledge the time and effort the reader puts into the feedback and accept the notes graciously, whatever their nature.

Every writer hopes for feedback of the “don’t change a thing” or “best thing you’ve ever written” type. But writers also know that no script is perfect, and very few are close to perfect. More helpful are constructive notes that identify structural weaknesses, character inconsistencies, or unnecessary elements.

Not every criticism is of equal value. Some will be valid, some will be inconsequential, some will be insightful. A writer doesn’t have to react to every note, but if

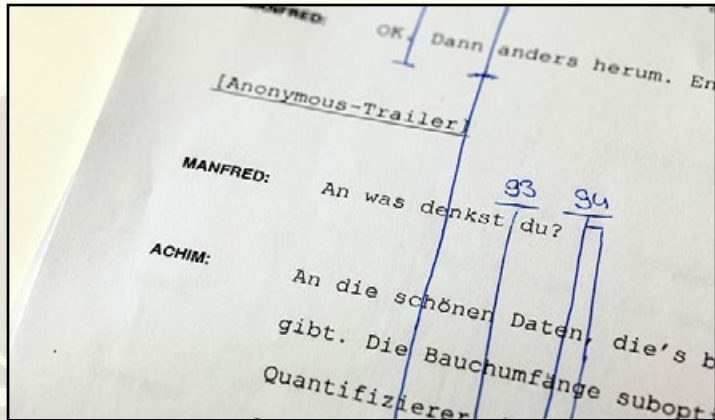
multiple readers mention the same problems or difficulties, those notes should be taken seriously.

Those who provide notes may have different qualifications, but all reactions are valid, just as the reaction of any audience member is valid.

There’s a story about Oscar Levant, the very quotable pianist and actor, coming out of a pre-release screening at Twentieth Century Fox. The film (I believe it was Cleopatra) represented an expensive gamble upon which the studio’s fate rested. Darryl Zanuck, head of Fox, asked Levant, “What did you think of the picture?”



Darryl Zanuck, 1964



Scene notes on a German screenplay (WikiCommons)

Levant replied candidly, “I think the picture stinks.”

Zanuck was highly offended. “Who the hell are you to think the picture stinks?”

After a brief pause to reflect, Levant asked, “Who the hell do I have to be to think the picture stinks?”

Personally, I do not look forward to getting notes on my work. But I have had many scripts improved by suggestions from development executives, countless magazine articles made better by editors, and almost everything I write enhanced by suggestions from my wife. Rewriting is vital to superior writing and notes fuel the rewrites.

If a writer is prone to acting defensively about notes, my advice is to read them, let them sit for a day or two, and then come back after the initial “this imbecile doesn’t know what he’s talking about” reaction has subsided. Chances are, those notes will make more sense and cause less anguish. And they may even contain ideas that will improve the script.

Be open to notes, be gracious to those who provide them, and use them as a valuable resource. They just might help make a good script out of one that stinks.

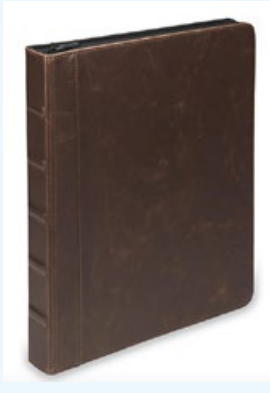
Lance Thompson is a script doctor, ghost writer and actor. He can be reached at scriptdoc88@gmail.com.

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A CONVERSATION WITH...

Jen Nash

As a Connector in Chief, she helps people and companies add more meaning to their lives through connection. She is a master story-telling facilitator, a connection-focused keynote speaker, a sought-after executive coach, and the author of the book: *The Big Power of Tiny Connections— How Small Interactions Spark Awesome Outcomes*.

B&P: You are an author, a corporate trainer and executive coach. Those seems like great qualities authors need to keep themselves on track and grounded. How do you balance those elements against just being yourself?

JN: I probably don't do as good a job of having "personal Jen" and "work Jen" as I should. In fact, I'll admit that when I have friends or non-coachee clients who are struggling with something— it does occasionally get tempting to slide into a coaching mindset. Why not? Everyone needs people around them asking great questions, reframing what they are going through and just get really curious about all the possible outcomes. However sometimes I also suggest that these friends book a coaching session with me, so they can see what it's like to spend time with a coach. I have some clients I've known for a decade as friends, and because I take the difference between church and state so seriously, it works. By that I mean we'll only talk about them during their session, but we'll have friendly chatter after a session or at another point in time so we can stay in the loop of each other's lives.

B&P: How did you find your way into coaching and training?



JN: I went through a few really challenging experiences in the past decade that lead me to mentoring, coaching and training. First while I was working at one of the biggest ad agencies in the world, there was an error with my hourly rate, and I didn't catch it for about seven months. Not surprising since no one gets pay stubs anymore. When I went to bat for myself with HR and payroll, I was pretty shocked at how uncomfortable it was talking about this mistake. They were nonplussed about the whole thing, but I just wanted to be sick. As a result, I started the MoneyInstigator.com brand and started mentoring women around self-worth and financial negotiations.

Then a few years later I went through a personal and professional challenge that threw my world into total chaos. I ended up hiring Bill Carmody who is an ICF Certified executive coach and over the course of a year and

a half, I totally overhauled my world. That would never have happened without the partnership and clarity I got working with Bill. In that time period I leaned into what I was good at, became an ICF certified coach so I could coach high-performing women who are pivoting in their lives. As for training, I love working with teams and shifting their approach away from selling and into connection focused problem solving. As a master connector and storyteller, it brings me a ton of joy to inspire groups to lean into their potential and adjust their skills in ways that will truly benefit them for their whole lives.

B&P: What is the weakest trait most people have when it comes to personal development/fulfillment post-Covid?

JN: During Covid we all got used to not going out. We got used to just doing stuff on Zoom events. To living our “vida-loca” in drawstring pajama pants that are so cozy — we never want to take them off. Only problem is now that we’re back in the swing of things, we’re still all addicted to that very-belly-comfortable-life. We’re habituated to not going out. To not connecting with our bosses, our coworkers, with our community. I’m totally guilty of this but more recently I’ve also really been trying to fight the urge to stay in. It’s hard to push ourselves to go to events, and even organize them, but connecting with people is the number one thing we can do to promote ourselves, our ideas, our books and our wellbeing. I truly believe connection is critical and putting it off hampers our personal development in every way.

B&P: Your book is “The Big Power of Tiny Connections — How Small Interactions Spark Awesome Outcomes.” Could you explain how it could benefit creative types, such as other authors?

JN: How you choose to publish your book is a huge process. Are you going to self-publish? Go the hybrid route with a reputable company like [halopublishing.com](#)? Work to get an agent so you can go the traditional publishing route? When deciding which route to go, most of us connect with our network, our friends and family as well as research. Plus, if you’re going to the book agent route you’re going to need to connect with as many people in the publishing world as possible. But how do you do that when you don’t know anyone? You rely on your network to know someone.

My book is not only a fun read, packed with stories about how small, seemingly irrelevant moments change the course of lives — but it’s also got a robust “how to” section. I get practical. I even craft follow-up emails for my readers because people struggle so much to follow up, I wanted to make it feel more doable. My book design was something I took very seriously so that creative types would feel the books was a fun, snappy read. I didn’t want it to feel like an overwhelming or “hard” ask. People are already scared enough about networking, I wanted to make it feel more approachable and worthwhile, not less so.

B&P: You advocate ‘Shake things up emotionally and support great employee satisfaction.’ This is a difficult concept for many employers where productivity is the driving force. How do you convince them otherwise?

JN: According to a survey by [Globoforce](#) done for [Workplace magazine](#), 62% of people would reject another job offer if they had more than five friends at their current job, and that number rises to over 70% for those with more than six friends at work. So helping your employees get connected on all the levels really pays off. Not sure of what

I’m saying? According to [Gallup](#), the cost of replacing an individual employee can range from one-half to two times that employee’s annual salary, which many say is a conservative estimate. That means that an organization employing 100 people where the average salary is \$50,000 would have replacement costs of about \$660,000 to \$2.6 million per year. So the choice is clear. Get your teams connecting emotionally or get prepared to spend.

B&P: Was writing the book difficult? What were your best and worst moments?

JN: I worked with the amazing team at [AuthorsWhoLead.com](#) which was a six-month program. When we finally got down to writing the bones of the book, we had 4 weeks and it was all consuming. It was in the middle of covid, it was early fall, and I decided to commit to writing 1600-1800 words a day. That may not sound like a lot, but it took on average 4-6 hours. Getting the world to leave you alone and also committing to that kind of dedicated focus six days a week for four weeks was a pretty large adjustment. My advice? Know in advance that your partner and kids won’t appreciate your focus. You household chores won’t appreciate that schedule. Your work won’t tolerate that kind of focus. But if you’re going to get this done, it’s either commit hard, or drag it out for a few months and commit to a schedule that will work for you.

As for best and worst moments? Well, the best moments for me were probably re-writing the entire book which I did 5 months after I finished the initial draft. Watching the book take a more evolved format and get smarter, more interesting was really fun for me. I’m so appreciative of my developmental editor [Ann Maynard](#). She rocked. And the worst moments? The worst moments are certainly having to

deal with unhappy partners or friends who feel like your writing is creating a wedge in your relationship. In the future I'll do a better job of managing expectations I suspect. Or just escape to a writer's lodge!

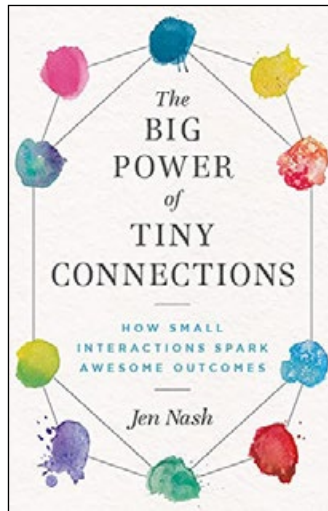
B&P: What's the biggest thing you've learned from being a published author?

JN: Ohhhh... great question. Thank you for asking that. I've learned a ton but if I had to pick one insight? I'd say that book still matter. They still impress people. Books support your brand, your messaging and that people love to see your book doing well, and will ask you about it all the time. if you don't want to hear the question: "How's your book doing?" be sure to publish multiple. I'm certainly hoping to write another one very soon.

B&P: Where do you see employment and the economy heading as we enter difficult times, or will the "Great Resignation" continue?

JN: I can't comment on employment or the economy as I left my crystal ball in the taxi last night, but I would

suggest all companies prioritize taking the time to find out best to support your employee's career trajectory. Take an interest in their hopes and dreams. Make a plan for progression. Offer leadership more support. I'm shocked by how many C-Suite leaders don't have coaches supporting them. Leaders do a better job when they are have sounding boards and they can brainstorm, reflect, and plan in a safe unbiased space. Plus coaching is a business expense and as such is a tax write off, so I really consider executive coaches a must for progressive leaders to want to have a greater impact on their company, their lives, and the world at large.



Learn more about Jen Nash and what she can do at: <https://www.jennash.com/about>

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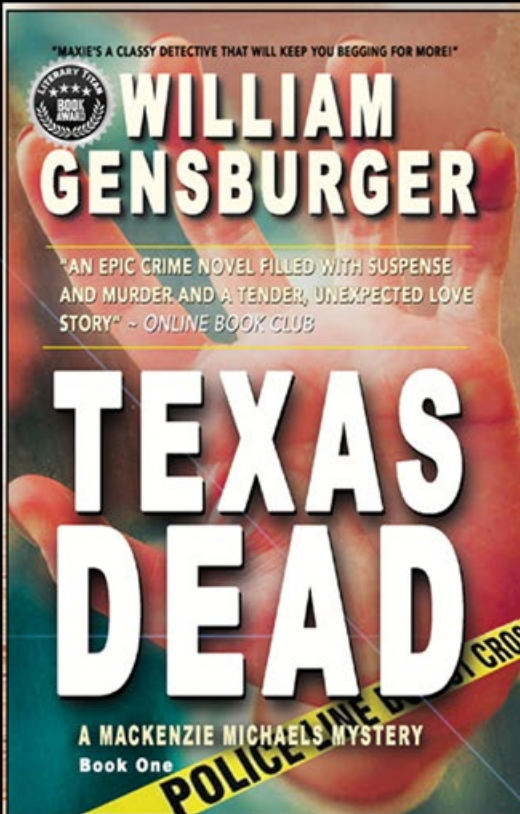
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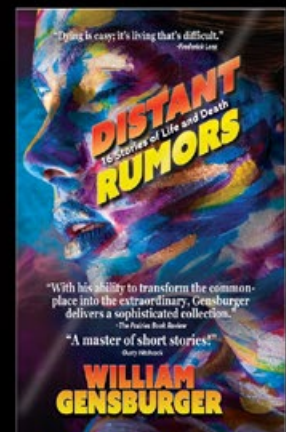
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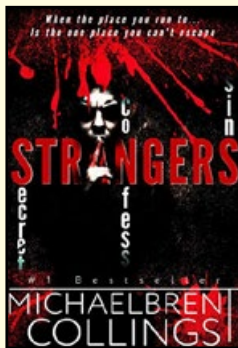
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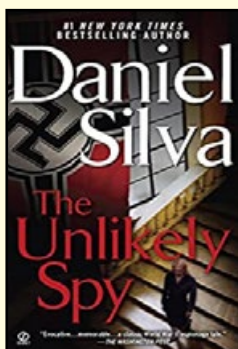
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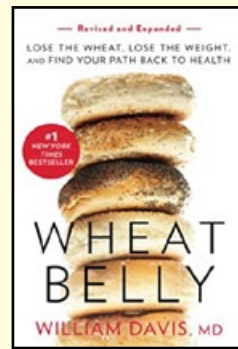
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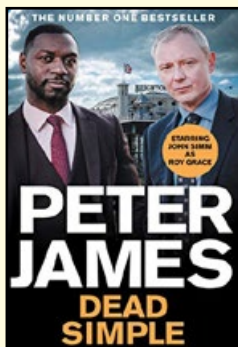
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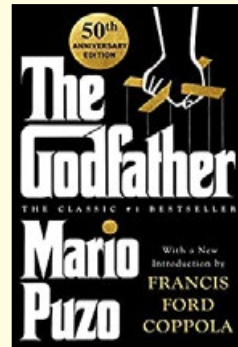
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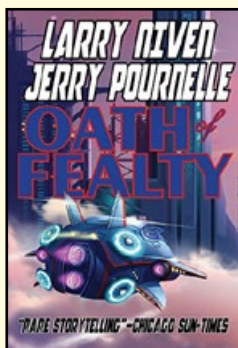
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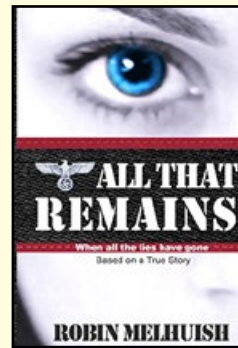
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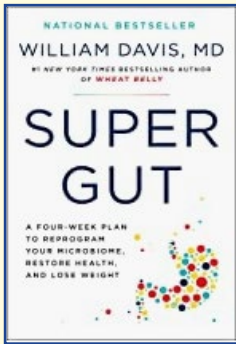


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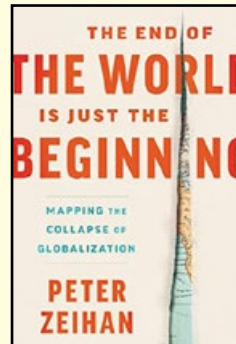
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2019 was the last great year for the world economy.

For generations, everything has been getting faster, better, and cheaper. Billions of people have been fed and educated as the American-led trade system spread across the globe.

All of this was artificial. All this was temporary. All this is ending.

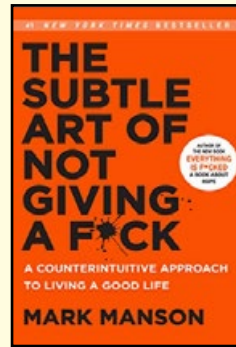
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John Perry did two things on his 75th birthday. First he visited his wife’s grave. Then he joined the army.

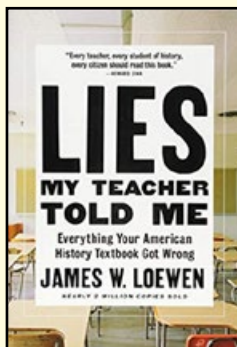
The good news is that humanity finally made it into interstellar space. The bad news is that planets fit to live on are scarce and aliens willing to fight for them are common. The universe, it turns out, is a hostile place.

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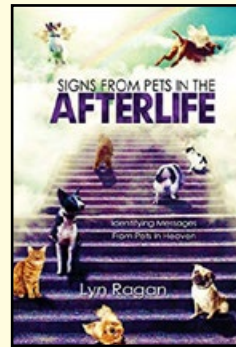
For decades, we’ve been told that positive thinking is the key to a happy, rich life. “F**k positivity,” Mark Manson says. “Let’s be honest, shit is f**ked and we have to live with it.” In his wildly popular Internet blog, Manson doesn’t sugarcoat or equivocate. He tells it like it is—a dose of raw, refreshing, honest truth that is sorely lacking today.

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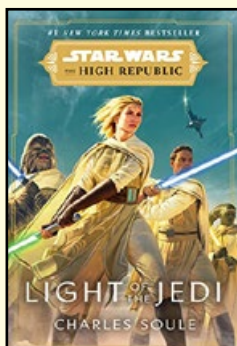
James W. Loewen brings history alive in all its complexity and ambiguity. Beginning with pre-Columbian history and ranging over characters and events as diverse as Reconstruction, Helen Keller, the first Thanksgiving, the My Lai massacre, 9/11, and the Iraq War.

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Signs from beloved pets are seen by thousands every day. Some communications are received in ways that do require an acute awareness as well as more interpretation. From the Heavens above, Signs are shared by deceased pets to connect with their families they left behind.

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It is a golden age. Intrepid hyperspace scouts expand the reach of the Republic to the furthest stars, worlds flourish under the benevolent leadership of the Senate, and peace reigns, enforced by the wisdom and strength of the renowned order of Force users known as the Jedi. When a shocking catastrophe in hyperspace tears a ship to pieces, the flurry of shrapnel emerging from the disaster threatens an entire system.

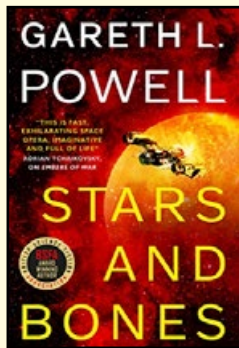
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The death of Queen Elizabeth II on 8 September 2022 was more than just a moment of profound sadness; her passing marked the end of an era in our national life – and the final closing of the Elizabethan Age. For millions of people, both in Britain and across the world, Elizabeth II was the embodiment of monarchy.

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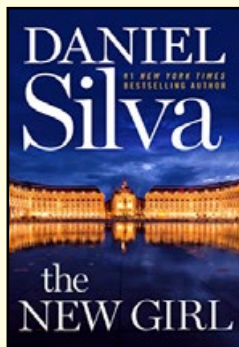
Seventy-five years from today, the human race has been cast from a dying Earth to wander the stars in a vast fleet of arks—each shaped by its inhabitants into a diverse and fascinating new environment, with its own rules and eccentricities. When her sister disappears while responding to a mysterious alien distress call, Eryn insists on being part of the crew sent to look for her, and may just hold the key to humanity's survival..

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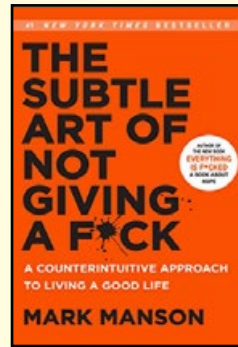
The United States lost World War II and was subsequently divided between the Germans in the East and the Japanese in the West. It's America in 1962. Slavery is legal once again. And it seems as though the answers might lie with Hawthorne Abendsen, a mysterious and reclusive author, whose best-selling novel describes a world in which the US won the War. Philip K. Dick at his best.

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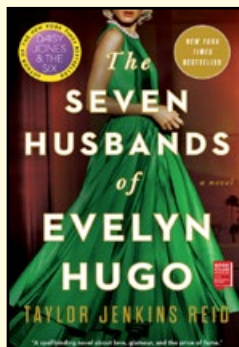
At an exclusive private school in Switzerland, mystery surrounds the identity of the beautiful raven-haired girl who arrives each morning in a motorcade fit for a head of state. Her father is Khalid bin Mohammed, a much-maligned crown prince of Saudi Arabia. He is now reviled for his role in the murder of a dissident journalist. And when his only child is brutally kidnapped, he turns to the one man he can trust to find her before it is too late. Gabriel Allon.

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For decades, we've been told that positive thinking is the key to a happy, rich life. "F**k positivity," Mark Manson says. "Let's be honest, shit is f**ked and we have to live with it." In his wildly popular Internet blog, Manson doesn't sugarcoat or equivocate. He tells it like it is—a dose of raw, refreshing, honest truth that is sorely lacking today.

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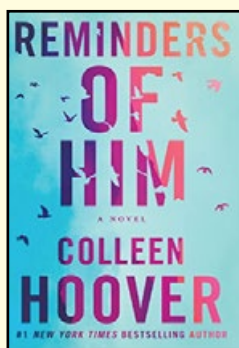
Aging and reclusive Hollywood movie icon Evelyn Hugo is finally ready to tell the truth about her glamorous and scandalous life. But when she chooses unknown magazine reporter Monique Grant for the job, no one is more astounded than Monique herself. Why her? Why now?

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Ryland Grace is the sole survivor on a desperate, last-chance mission. Except that right now, he doesn't know that. He can't even remember his own name, let alone the nature of his assignment or how to complete it. And he's just been awakened to find himself millions of miles from home, with nothing but two corpses for company.

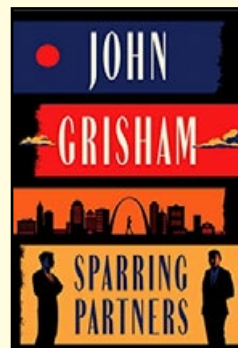
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From #1 New York Times bestselling author Colleen Hoover.

After serving five years in prison for a tragic mistake, Kenna Rowan returns to the town where it all went wrong, hoping to reunite with her four-year-old daughter. But the bridges Kenna burned are proving impossible to rebuild. Everyone in her daughter's life is determined to shut Kenna out, no matter how hard she works to prove herself.

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#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER • John Grisham is the acknowledged master of the legal thriller. In his first collection of novellas, law is a common thread, but America's favorite storyteller has several surprises in store.

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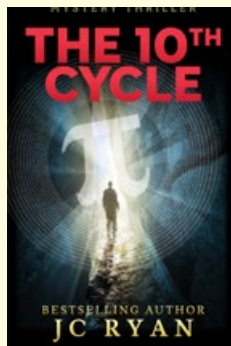
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From top-ten bestseller Ella Carey comes an utterly heartbreaking historical novel about the courage, love and friendships that sustain us in the darkest of days. [Click HERE.](#)



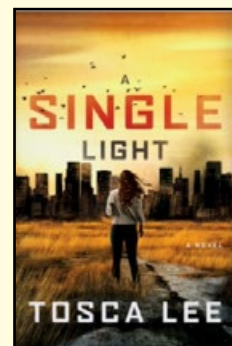
Viktor is a prequel to P. Matern's award-winning The Vampire Princess Trilogy, which tells the origin of the Svalbard Empire's most infamous villain. [Click HERE.](#)



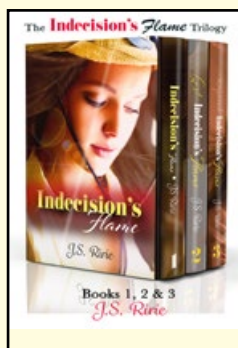
The truth about human history can be found inside the Great Pyramid of Giza. Will Daniel Rossler and Dr. Sarah Clarke be allowed to uncover the real and true message? [Click HERE.](#)



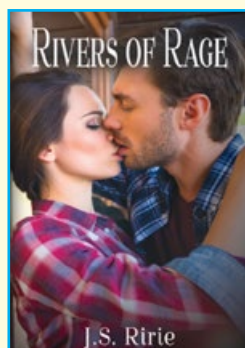
An extinct disease re-emerges from melting Alaskan permafrost causing madness in victims. Recent apocalyptic cult escapee Wynter Roth believes it's the end. [Click HERE.](#)



In this high-octane sequel to The Line Between, cult escapee Wynter Roth and ex-soldier Chase Miller emerge from their bunker to find a country ravaged by disease. [Click HERE.](#)



Brylee Hawkins was going home to confront her father so she could marry the man of her dreams. But the Australian Outback wasn't the place she remembered [Click HERE.](#)



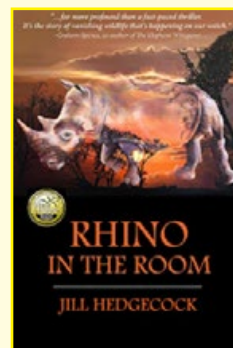
Her parents had dropped her off at a stranger's house with no intention of returning. But left with the will to survive, she embraces a new life. [Click HERE.](#)



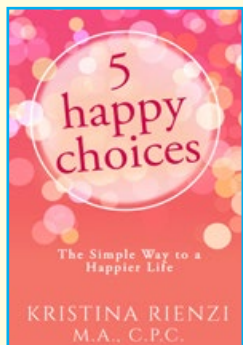
When an unknown vessel arrives through a new wormhole, an already battle-scarred Starplex could be the starting point of a new interstellar war . . . [Click HERE.](#)



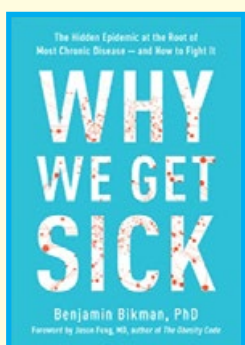
It was meant to be a harmless stag-night prank. But a few hours later, the groom has disappeared and his friends are dead. Roy Grace is contacted to learn the truth. [Click HERE.](#)



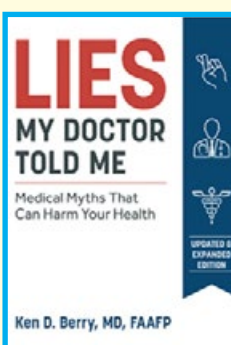
Can Claire and her dad overcome their broken relationship on a Safari, in order to save their own lives and the last two black rhinos from extinction? [Click HERE.](#)



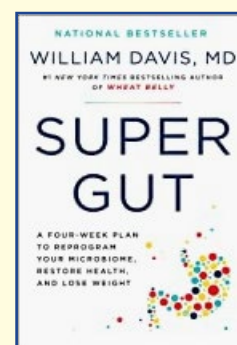
Kristina's 5 Happy Choices encourages, empowers, and inspires you to choose happiness as a technique to take control of your life with simple, easy-to-use action plans. [Click HERE.](#)



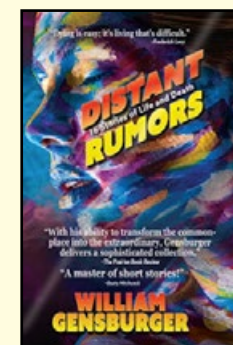
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Has your doctor lied to you? Eat low-fat and high-carb, including plenty of "healthy" whole grains—does that sound familiar? Your guide to optimal health! [Click HERE.](#)



Super Gut shows readers how to eliminate bad bacteria and bring back the missing "good" bacteria with a four-week plan to reprogram your microbiome. [Click HERE.](#)



16 Masterful Short Stories covering the spectrum of life, love, & death. The anthology includes drama, mystery, science fiction, dystopic, & more. [Click HERE.](#)

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