

Writers League of The Villages



*Information, education,
and networking for writers.*

Laurel Manor Recreation Center
1st Wednesday of the Month
8:30AM-10:30AM

www.WLOV.org

Writers League of The Villages

WLOV NEWSLETTER

April 1, 2019





Message from Your Newsletter Editor

Larry Martin, drlarry437@gmail.com

Now that I have your attention, let me repeat:

www.wlov.org

It's all in there, the club's website, where you'll find:

- List of upcoming events
- All past newsletters
- Info about our board members
- Articles and recent news items about club members
- List of critique clubs in The Villages
- WLOV catalogue of members' books, with blurbs on each book and an Amazon link
- Want Ads for services related to writing and book promotion

...and so much more.

So, if in doubt about what's going on, or who's doing what, go to www.wlov.org

And if something's not in there that you think should be, please email me the item.

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WLOV Calendar of Upcoming Events

Wednesday, April 3 - General Meeting, Laurel Manor Rec Center, 8:30 am – 10:30 am

Special event will be **Research Your Character Fair**. For details please see President's Message, below.

Thursday, April 4, at 6 pm - WLOV member Sue Ann Baker will speak about her book *Behind the Shades*, Chula Vista Rec Center, 1011 Rio Grande Avenue. Ms. Baker was one of the very first U.S. Secret Service agents, and the book is about her career. Admission is free but space is limited, so please RSVP to Mary Murphy, 352-753-1547, or murphy1824@aol.com

Sunday, April 21 – Whispering Oaks Winery book signing, 1-4 pm. See page 5.

Wednesday, May 1 - General Meeting, Laurel Manor Rec Center, 8:30 am – 10:30 am

After a short business meeting we will have The Gong Show.” You can deliver a one-minute pitches of your book. May the best pitch win.

MESSAGE FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

Paula Howard

Hi, Everybody!



On April 3 come to “Meet Your Character” Fair at Laurel Manor. Many have already signed up for their 15-minute sit-down, with a choice of speaking to 13 professionals – to learn about a character for your next novel. There are some spaces available, so join us that morning. Scheduled are: **Forensic Psychologist, Detective, Policeman, Sheriff, Prisoner, Cardiologist, Marine Vet, IT Tech (who can talk about Cyber Security), Foreign Service Officer, Spy, Probation Officer, Defense Attorney, and...**

...Big Announcement: An additional professional has been added to the lineup – one of the first female **Secret Service Agents** to serve at the White House will be there.

Sue Ann Baker, a WLOV member, is also pitching her story to a major TV outlet. Come talk with her!

Don't forget **you can also get your professional head and shoulder photo taken at the meeting** while others are interviewing the professional characters. **Neola Photography** will be there and for **\$50 you can get your photo taken**. Use it on your book cover, Facebook page, or in your publicity such as bookmarks, postcards, and more. A professional photo is a must!

We'll have a makeup artist there, too, to make sure you look your best.

Looking ahead to May: Ever hear of “**The Gong Show**”? Well, get ready as WLOV is having one of their own on **Wednesday, May 1, at Laurel Manor Rec Center**. You know how important it is to explain your novel in less than one minute, right? It's been called “an elevator talk.” Well, to help members prepare one, we're asking everyone to come to the May meeting with a one-minute explanation of their book(s) ready for reading. If anyone goes over the mark – they'll hear the “gong”. We're trying to help members realize how little time they have to capture the interest of potential readers. There will be prizes!

Talk about Fun? Lots of it! We're also having a moderator (TBA) from a local college to help us learn more about Metaphors and How to Write Them. Examples will be shown. Some really bad ones but humorous, indeed!

And, as an early reminder, WLOV's next **Central Florida Book and Author Expo** will take place on Sunday, January 26, 2020, 11 am to 4 pm, Eisenhower Recreation Center. We have a few months yet before signups for tables will begin. See you on April 3 at Laurel Manor!

Oh, one more thing. I AM LOOKING FOR VOLUNTEERS. REVIEW THE LIST BELOW. IF YOU CAN VOLUNTEER, PLEASE CONTACT ME AT paulahoward777@gmail.com. **WLOV needs volunteers to help in a number of areas, to:**

- greet members at door before meeting starts
- sign out books at the Read, Review, Return book table, for April and May
- help promote the Sunday Whispering Oaks Winery book signing events
- help plan the August "Summer Salad and Ice Cream Social"
- make some phone calls to members about different items that come up.
- work on the program planning committee
- take over job of "social secretary"

Recent news about WLOV authors

News items are now grouped by month. To read the current items, go to <http://wlov.weebly.com/wlov-newsletters--news-items.html> and scroll down to March, 2019 News Items

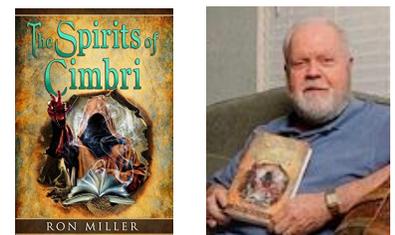
Article about Mark Newhouse's new book, *The Devil's Bookkeepers*, *Villages Daily Sun*, March 10, 2019



Article about Wilma Fleming's new book, *The Curse at Lilac Waters*, *The Villages Magazine*, March, 2019

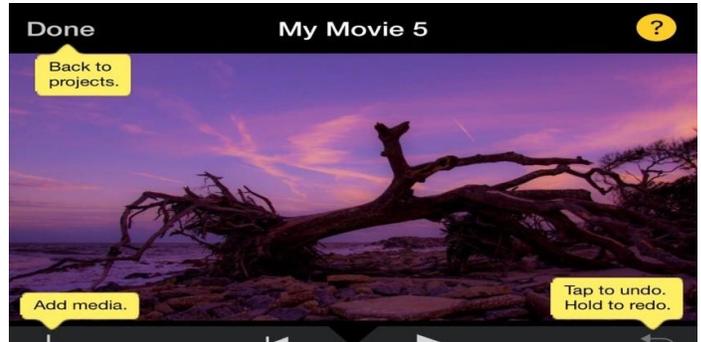
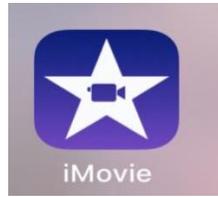


Article about Ron Miller's new historical fiction *The Spirits of Cimbri*, and its sequel, *Villages Style Magazine*, March 2019



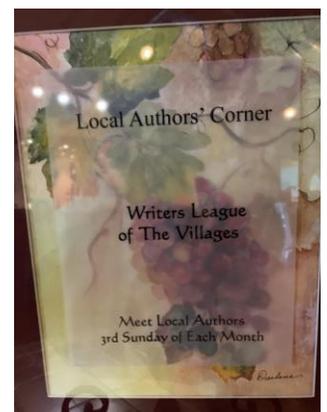
March 6 – Speaker Presentation

Nicol Hamil (in photo) spoke on using your smartphone to make and edit movies. Step by step instructions from Ms. Hamil are on our website, www.wlov.org, under Past Events, March 6, 2019.



WLOV's Whispering Oaks Book Signing Event

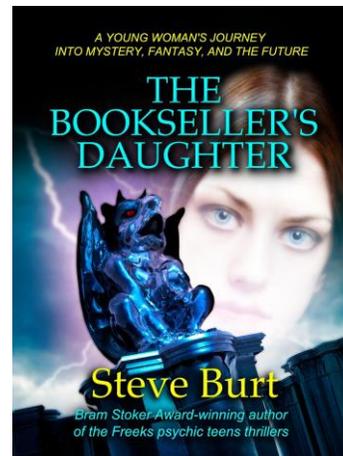
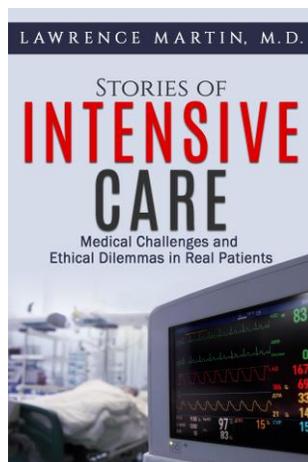
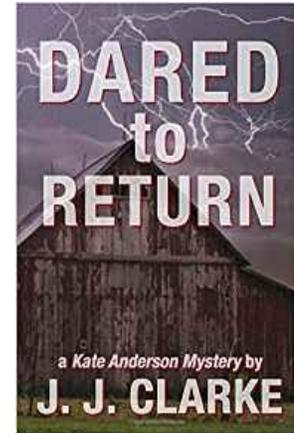
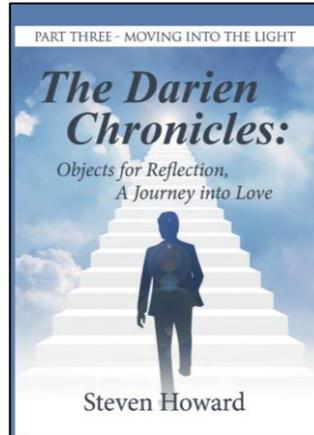
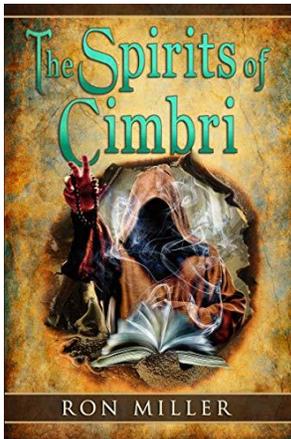
Our second monthly event at Whispering Oaks Winery was held Sunday, March 17, 1-4 pm. The four featured authors were Rita Boehm, Katherine Schumm, Jim Meyer, and Donn Dears. Below are a few pics from that event.



The next WO book signing is Sunday, April 21, and will feature Peggy Best, Jack Hayes, JJ Clarke (Julie Johnson) and Bill Pullen. WO Winery is located at 10934 S Hwy 475, Oxford, FL, about 20 minutes' drive from Lake Sumter Landing. For info on signing up for these monthly events, contact Ann Heathman, annheathman@gmail.com.

New Books added to WLOV Catalogue

If you've recently published a book, and wish to have it listed in our catalogue, send me the cover, a blurb and the Amazon link. drlarry437@gmail.com.



Mark Newhouse passed along email from Lois W. Stern, about a writing contest with deadline of April 15: www.tales2inspire.com/contest

Get published in the Award-winning Tales2Inspire Anthology Series
CURRENT CONTEST THEME: STRONGER TODAY BECAUSE . . . Write a moving story about that person or life changing event, and enter your 1200-word maximum length story into this next Tales2Inspire contest. NO ENTRANCE FEES, this is an 'Authors Helping Authors' project. See all details at: www.tales2inspire.com/contest
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Chris Coward: Author, Critique Leader, and Chairperson of FWA's RPLA Competition

LM: You're a writer, you run the Oxford Writers Critique Group, and you also chair the prestigious Royal Palm Literary Awards competition for Florida Writers Association. Let's start with the writing first. How and when did you become a writer?

CC: I imagine everyone reading this newsletter dabbled in writing as soon as they learned the alphabet. What drew me was fascination with my father's typewriter. My father was a sports columnist for the *Washington Star*, and I'd watch, mesmerized, as he pecked away, fast as a machine gun. He didn't even look at the keys.

Oh, I wanted to play with that machine! Then he said, "Sure. As long as you use the right fingers." By the time I was in second grade (in Arlington, VA, where I was raised), I could touch-type, which was a good thing because I have horrible handwriting.

Throughout school, I couldn't relate to the artsy English-major types, so my writing was confined to things with a purpose, such as research papers and, in college, philosophy papers.

LM: Where was college?

CC: I was a philosophy major at the College of William and Mary, in Williamsburg, Virginia, with a minor in physics.

LM: Physics? What was your career goal with that major and minor?

CC: Philosophy and physics! Suuurre, *that's* a popular combo for employment! The physics would have been marketable had I persisted, but no. I was a philosophy major, meaning I wasn't exactly on the career track for any of the usual jobs advertised. Like lots of folks in the hippie era, I was thinking fulfillment. I was thinking mind expansion (non-drug). I was NOT thinking career.

I thought about the government, but that presented challenges, not all related to the non-marketability of philosophy. The Vietnam Vets were returning, and, quite rightly, they received preference for the professional jobs. I guess not many were proficient at typing, which (thanks, Dad!) I was.

So, *ta da*, my first job out of college, 1972, was as a clerk typist,

LM: Where was that?

CC: At Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, what is now called the DEA. Almost immediately I was asked to edit the agency's in-house newsletter. Then, after a few months, a strange thing happened. I was summoned by the director, Mr. John Bartels. It was strange that in an agency of some 5,000 souls, the director—a presidential appointee—would summon a 22-year-old GS-4 clerk typist to his office. It was like going to the principal's office. I was shaking. What had I done?

LM: Sounds like a promotion is coming.

CC: Sort of. He explained that heroin abuse had mushroomed, and he was getting complaints from the medical community that the agency's interdiction efforts were causing a codeine shortage (heroin and codeine both being produced from opium). I kind of looked around, figuring he was talking to someone else, but no. I was the only visitor to his 11th floor suite. Well, I had zero knowledge of the issue so asked him the obvious: why me? He explained he'd given the same assignment to two of his assistant administrators, each of whom was an expert in some aspect of the issue. Also, the Office of Management and Budget was working on it. But he wanted something different—a fresh take. He assigned me a private office on the second floor, relieved me of all other duties, and said to get cracking. Holy s**t! I said, *yes sir*, but I was soooooo in over my head. The first thing I did was go back to my desk and cry.

LM: After you wiped away the tears, then what happened?

CC: I won't bore with the details. Suffice to say I worked about 12 hours a day, 6 or 7 days a week, and after 11 months, handed over a book on the subject -- which, of course, I typed myself.

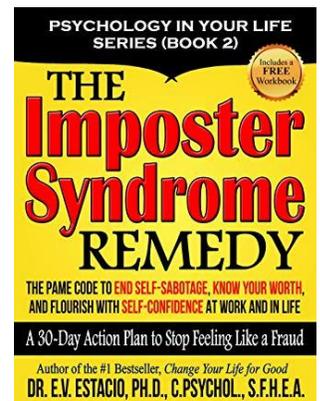
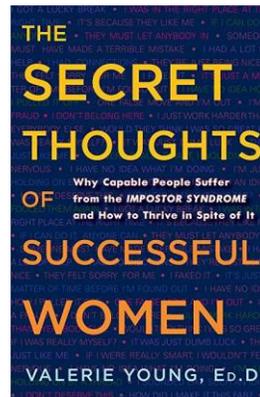
It earned me a promotion to the training office, to write speeches for VIP visitors, then a promotion to international operations to write United Nations statements, and finally two promotions in the office of congressional affairs to write congressional testimony. By then there was a movement afoot for the FBI to absorb DEA, so Peter Bensinger, the new DEA administrator, appeared before Congress frequently. I was busy!

Thinking back on this makes me think of my WLOV colleagues and their fascinating careers. As for my own path, I don't mind saying that at the time I wasn't impressed or excited by the challenges. Honestly, I was terrified. It reminds me of the "imposter syndrome."

LM: The Imposter Syndrome?

CC: That's when you don't feel worthy of something, and you think, eventually, everyone will see you're a fake. You can Google the term and see how prevalent it is, particularly within the writing community. I first heard about this syndrome at a conference planning session. I know there are books about it, but, um, I've been too busy to read them, for now. Anyway, had the syndrome then, have it now. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

[Editor's note. I looked it up on Amazon, and found several books on the subject, two shown here. This syndrome is new to me.]



LM: So, what exactly was your career before retirement, and when did you move to The Villages?

CC: I've already mentioned what happened at DEA. After seven years there, I got married and pregnant and "retired."

On the mommy track! Between diaper changes, I attended classes and got a master's degree in English with a concentration in professional writing and editing from George Mason University. Then I started my own business writing resumes and helping doctoral candidates with their dissertations. The candidates were referred by my old professors. Soon there were other professors referring their candidates. We've all had had these things happen—when the events that shape our career seem to happen accidentally.

When the family moved to South Florida, I taught English at Broward College while the kids were in school. When they got older, I got jobs with more standard hours, editing several magazines and heading up marketing departments for two Florida companies. In 2005, we moved to The Villages, and for a year, I continued working remotely.

LM: Your bio on the FWA website states you have ghostwritten for presidential appointees and CEOs, headed corporate marketing departments, edited national magazines, and taught college English. How did the ghostwriting job come about? What did you write? Can you name names?

CC: The ghostwriting was government and corporate. The presidential appointee I wrote for most was Peter Bensinger, the DEA administrator. I also wrote some drug-abuse-related speeches for members of the

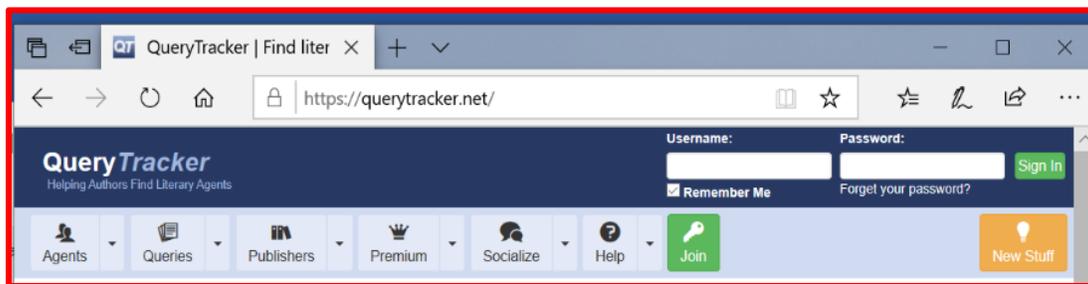
Department of Justice and the White House. Magazines I edited included *Country Magazine* (which became *Mid-Atlantic Country*), *Medical Marketing and Media*, and various Caribbean magazines—you know, the kind you find in your hotel room that tell you where to dine and shop.

LM: What are you working on now?

CC: My most recent project is *Singular Women*, which is nerdy women’s alternative fiction. I’m going through the fascinating process of seeking representation for it. If anyone wants to try the traditional publishing route, I highly recommend two websites: Query Shark for background and QueryTracker for query management.

LM: What exactly are Query Shark and QueryTracker, and how do you use them?

CC: My journey started in reverse. I discovered QueryTracker first (<https://querytracker.net/>). It meant no more combing through expensive directories, no creating spreadsheets from scratch. There are thousands of agents and publishers in the system, and I started with a Boolean search. My genre is odd—a blend of women’s fiction and science fiction—so I asked the system to show me agents who represent both. The system groups agents who are in the same agency. That way, you query only one agent from an agency at a time.



QueryTracker not only shows a profile of the agents but also their response rate, acceptance rate, and other data. So, when multiple agents from the same agency showed up on my list, I took the one with the highest acceptance rate. It was easy to navigate the data, which got me down to 50 some-odd agents on my personal spreadsheet. On that spreadsheet I can track every query.

I started by contacting 2 agents and within minutes received 2 auto-replies. Within 12 hours, I received a bona-fide response—from the head of the agency. She said my query letter was ghastly. Okay, not in so many words, but that was the message. I was surprised because, while I may be deficient in many skills, I never thought writing a business letter as one of them. This agent suggested that I view the website “Query Shark”, <https://queryshark.blogspot.com/>.

LM: Reminds me of TV’s “Shark Tank.”

CC: A little different. Since 2006, Query Shark has been critiquing query letters, for free.



The catch: you must swear that you read the Shark’s entire archives, which covers hundreds of queries and their extensive critiques. I figured if I read a hundred or so, I’d get the gist, but since I had to swear that I’d

read them all, what could I do? Read them all! And you know what? Just when I thought things were getting repetitive, something new would come up.

LM: Sounds like a lot of work.

CC: Yes, it was. It took hours to read all of the Shark’s directives, but basically, she advocates an entirely different way of constructing a query—not so much as a business letter but more like what you’d read on a book’s back cover. No synopsis. No long bio. Snappy. She stresses that the agent may be reading the query on her phone, so those first few lines need to grab.

The Shark has a formula but doesn’t hesitate to show successful queries that break the formula. So, I have one query that follows the rules, and one that breaks them. It’ll be interesting to see which works better. I sent both to the Shark to see if she chooses one for her archives. Haven’t heard yet.

And BTW, the agent who dissed my query, invited me to reapply—after going through the Query Shark gauntlet. You bet I will.

LW: Doesn’t FWA, at its annual October meeting, also offer the opportunity to meet with agents?

CC: Absolutely. Several of our members have signed publishing contracts resulting from these meetings. I’m certainly going to try that option myself. Query Shark is just another stone to turn over in your quest for agent representation.

LM: When did you begin running the Oxford Writing Group?

CC: February 2007. FWA had another group in the area, but it was getting awfully big. Plus, with its being a day group, working folks couldn’t attend. So, I started an evening group. Right now, we have four folks who join us after work.



LM: Apart from being outside The Villages, and open to anyone, how does the Oxford group differ from critique groups within The Villages?

CC: The Oxford group is open to anyone, but other than that, I imagine it’s much like many of the groups in The Villages. We meet the first Wednesday and third Thursday of every month from 5:45 to 8:00 pm at the Oxford Community Building near the intersection of 466 and 301 (see photo). The address is 4027 County Rd. 106 (Main Street), Oxford FL 34484.

You don’t need to be a member of FWA, though newbies usually see the benefits of the larger organization and join. We write in a variety of genres, represent a range of ages, and all levels. Those who’ve been attending for a while have grown remarkably—not only in their writing but in critiquing skill, which are not unrelated. The biggest difference between Oxford Writers and other groups within The Villages, however, is our connection to the larger organization, FWA.

LM: For our readers who may not be members, what exactly is FWA?

CC: FWA is a statewide professional trade organization, though we have members across the country (and a few overseas). The association boasts some 1,500 members and offers many benefits. Most members are writers, but some are agents, publishers, illustrators, editors, and other industry professionals. Membership is open. Details are on <https://floridawriters.net/>.



We have an annual conference, where you can meet and schedule individual appointments with agents, publishers, and other industry experts. The conference, in October, lasts 4 days and attracts some 600 attendees. And, oh, the workshops! We usually have 5 going at a time, all day and sometimes into the evening, so there's something for everyone.

FWA also sponsors two writing competitions, RPLA and Collection. RPLA confers trophies, and Collection publishes winning entries. We also offer mini-conferences, webinars, and other services, along with some 60 local groups that meet regularly. All the details are on our website.

LM: There is a fee to join?

CC: Membership for the statewide organization is \$55 a year, with a discount for 2-year and Lifetime memberships. Members get a subscription to *The Florida Writer* magazine; a subscription to the FWA eNews; reduced advertising rates in *The Florida Writer*; and access to the FWA Network, which is a social networking site where members can make writing-related connections.

Members are also eligible for reduced rates to attend the annual conference, mini-conferences, and webinars. They may enter RPLA, and also the short story contest where winning stories are published in the annual *Florida Writers Association Collection*. They are also entitled to use FWA's Editors Helping Writers editorial service; submit writing-related accomplishments and creative writing to *The Florida Writer* magazine; and participate in local writers group discussions, critiques, and learning opportunities.

LM: At one point you were president of FWA, then became head of RPLA. Please give us a chronology.

CC: This is a brain-strainer. My first role was as finance chairperson. This was in 2006-07. Then I became marketing chairperson for several years. When the RPLA chairmanship became vacant, I was tapped to take it on. (For some reason, folks have always been nervous about heading RPLA.) I said, *sure* (where angels fear to tread), and chaired RPLA for two years. In 2012, I became FWA's vice president and in 2013, president. Then the RPLA chairperson unexpectedly resigned, and there were no fearless angels willing to do any treading, so with some regret I resigned the presidency a little early and picked up RPLA, where I've been ever since.



LM: Please explain how the RPLA competition works.

CC: The Royal Palm Literary Awards (RPLA) competition is for adult and youth writers. The webpage for RPLA is <https://floridawriters.net/competitions-awards/royal-palm-literary-award/>. RPLA covers virtually every kind of work, from short to book length, fiction to nonfiction, prose to poetry to play. Entrants may write on any subject, and published and unpublished works are evaluated separately. The contest is underway now, with a deadline for all entries of April 30. Winners earn bragging rights, badges, and trophies, and all entrants receive professional feedback. [Photo shows Chris Coward, center, with early RPLA Award Winners.]

The competition has evolved over the years. It kicked off in 2001. At first, everything was done by snail-mail, but ten years later RPLA went digital. In 2015 the youth component was added. Other innovations were added over time: electronic badges for semifinalists, finalists, and winners; media-release templates for winners; and cash awards for the Books of the Year. The awards banquet grew increasingly elaborate, and a few years ago we slide shows of authors and their books on giant screens in the banquet hall.

All 27 adult and 5 youth genre-categories may have winners. And, oh the grand awards! Initially, there was only Book of the Year, which was conferred to the book-length entry with the highest total score. Then the designation was given only to published books. In 2009 RPLA added Unpublished Book of the Year.

There are other awards, which are listed on the website. But perhaps the best thing about RPLA is the feedback every entrant gets, from at least 2 judges. Over and over I see entrants lose one year, only to revise and resubmit their work the next year—and win!

LM: For the record, running this competition is an unpaid position?

CC: Except for the editor of *The Florida Writer*, all FWA positions are unpaid.

LM: How about the judges, are they all volunteers?

CC: They are, bless them. And we always need more. I know for a fact that WLOV has a ton of qualified people. If you know what POV and info-dumps are, dear members of WLOV, why not apply? Email me at rplarubrics@comcast.net for more information.

LM: No writing competition is without peril for the authors, and aggravation for the administrators. How has RPLA evolved over the years to make it a better, fairer competition?

CC: Lots of ways, but the most obvious is oversight. From the beginning we've checked entries for eligibility and then the chairperson would send them to the judges. Then judges would evaluate the entries using the appropriate rubric template (all genre-categories have a genre-specific rubric). These rubrics are the standard by which the entries are compared apples to apples. Judges then return the completed rubrics to me.

LM: And what happens from there?

CC: Here's where things get really interesting. Beginning 4 years ago, we brought on rubric coordinators, or RCs, who comb through the completed rubrics, ensuring that they sound right, that the comments jibe with the scores, that the math is correct, and that the comments are constructive.

This year, we have 13 RCs, and they are busy. For each rubric, once everything looks okay, the RC certifies it and sends it back to me. Entries that make the semifinals are sent to a final judge—another rubric! At the end of the competition, I send the completed rubrics to the entrants.

The RPLA team also meets every November to discuss issues and suggestions. The team consists of anywhere from 12 to 16 people, and the meeting lasts all day. Which brings up another innovation that helps the competition continue to improve: surveys of entrants and judges. We pay attention to these surveys.

LM: Given what sounds like a full-time vocation, do you have time for any activities in TV?

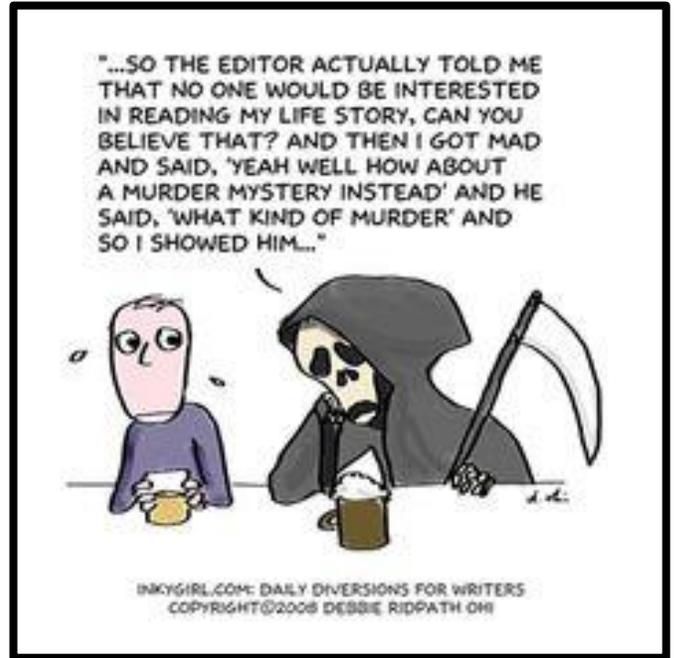
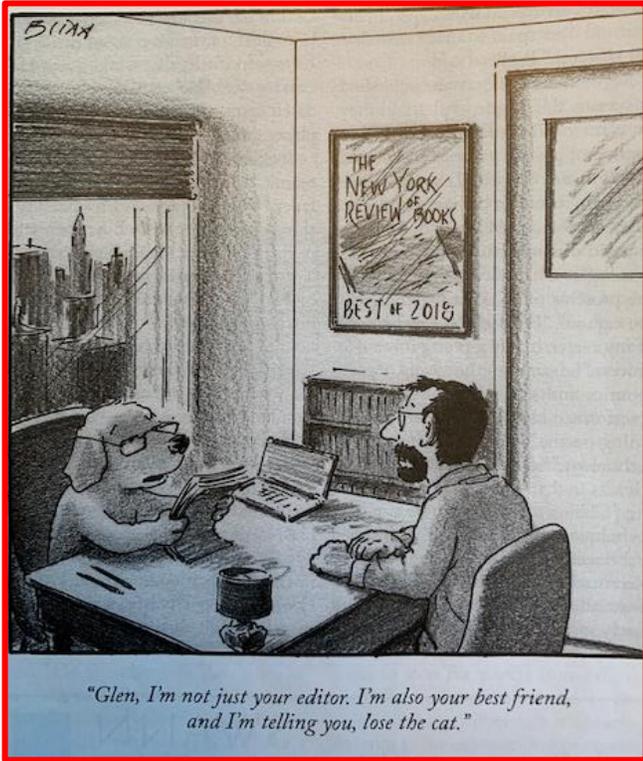
CC: What? There are activities in The Villages? Who knew?

Seriously, FWA takes up *a lot* of my time. Plus, I'm an introvert. About the only things I do outside of FWA are attend WLOV meetings, do activities with our neighborhood social club, and enjoy my children and grandchildren.

A good life, all told.

LM: Thanks, Chris.

Cartoons...



...and food for thought.

