



# FRIENDS OF AMERICAN WRITERS



NOVEMBER

2013-2014 NUMBER 3

CHICAGO

WWW.FAWCHICAGO.ORG

THE FORTNIGHTLY CLUB  
OF CHICAGO

120 E. BELLEVUE PLACE

## President's Message

CHRISTINE BERN, *President*

**I**N NOVEMBER we announce our scholarship recipients from National Louis University and Roosevelt University. Through these scholarships, we continue to encourage high standards among American writers and recognize gifted writers. This year, we are pleased to award scholarships to Kendra Harding from National Louis University and Jim Kurlos from Roosevelt University.

The scholarship money is taken from the Friends of American Writers Foundation Fund. This fund is different from the Patron's Fund, which supports our May literary awards. The Foundation Fund is funded by gifts and donations from members, and the interest on this money is used to support the scholarship program. The Foundation Fund is administered by three FAW members who also serve as its Board of Trustees. FAW members may, at any time, donate to this Foundation Fund. A donation of \$100 or more entitles you to be listed in the yearbook as a Foundation Fund Contributor. Please give generously.

## Chicago-Area Writers Scheduled to Visit on November 13

ROBERTA GATES, *Program Chair*

Our name says it all: we are a group that befriends writers. That's why we've scheduled three programs this year featuring Midwestern writers who are well worth meeting, beginning with novelist Jim Kokoris and essayist Tom Montgomery Fate, both of whom will be joining us on November 13.

### Jim Kokoris

Jim, who was our 2002 award winner for his debut novel *The Rich Part of Life*, has written two more books since then and will be coming out with a fourth in 2014. You might think that with that kind of productivity Jim must be a full-time writer, but he is actually a busy executive at a Chicago public relations firm. In spite of his demanding schedule, however, he manages to devote an hour and a half each morning to his writing, proving that it's not just talent, but discipline, that makes a writer.

Described as "a shrewd and compassionate observer" by Booklist, Jim has the ability to combine hilarity and poignancy in his writing. "There's only a thin line between comedy and tragedy," he explains, and, besides, he says he enjoys taking the reader in different and unexpected directions.

*The Rich Part of Life*, his first book, features a father of three sons whose life is turned upside down when he wins \$190 million in the lottery. His second novel, entitled *Sister North*, is the highly original tale of a Chicago lawyer ("not a very good one," says Jim) who becomes obsessed—in a good way—with a nun from Lake Eagleton, Wisconsin. *The Pursuit of Other Interests*, his third book, tells the story of a top ad executive who suddenly finds himself out of a job.

Jim received a bachelor's degree in communications from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and lives in west suburban LaGrange.

### Tom Montgomery Fate

Tom Montgomery Fate, who has visited us before, writes creative nonfiction with such a lyrical touch that it often comes close to being poetry. His most recent book is *Cabin Fever: A Suburban Father's Search*

continued on  
next page ►

*for the Wild*, which records his modern-day attempt to duplicate Henry David Thoreau's retreat into the woods. The result is a book that brings the reader close to the mysteries of nature, yet celebrates the human relationships which also give meaning to our lives. Just a glance at his chapter titles is enough to demonstrate their breadth, from "Fathers Watching Sons" and "Picking Blackberries" to "Coyotes at the Mall."

Tom is now hard at work on a new book that he describes as "a travel memoir," which, among other things, "will explore the problem/promise of living and writing across cultures." To gather material for

his book, Tom recently paid an extended visit to the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota where he visited with modern-day medicine men and participated in sweat lodge ceremonies.

Other books by Tom include *Beyond the White Noise* (1997) and *Steady and Trembling* (2005). He received a bachelor's degree from the University of Iowa and a Master of Fine Arts degree in creative nonfiction from the renowned Writers' Workshop. He also has a master's degree in divinity from the Chicago Theological Society. Tom lives in west suburban Glen Ellyn, where he is a professor of English at the College of DuPage.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS



### November Luncheon

Reservations for the November luncheon are due no later than Sunday, November 10, at 6:00 p.m. To reserve, please call only Pat Adelberg, 847-588-0911 or Lorraine Campione, 773-275-5118. The cost is \$40, payable by check to FAW. Please pay at the reception desk in the front lobby on the day of the luncheon—do not

mail checks in advance. If you wish to sit with friends, please inform Pat or Lorraine. If you are reserving for a group, we ask that only one person make the group request to avoid confusion.

If you make a reservation and find that you cannot attend, you must cancel no later than 6:00 p.m. on the Sunday preceding the scheduled meeting. Reservations not cancelled must be paid for by the member.

Please note: In response to popular demand, the chef will be offering a fish preparation for the November luncheon.

Special menu: A vegetarian plate may be requested when you make your reservation.

### Book Sale

Throughout the year, the Juvenile Committee and the Literary Committee receive many excellent books for review. These books will be on sale at

the November luncheon. Be sure to browse and select a few for your reading enjoyment.

### Looking Ahead

Mark your calendars to attend the FAW tea on December 19 at 12:00 noon. The renowned male a capella choir from Walter Payton College Prep High School, The Sounds of Sweetness (SOS), will present a special program of holiday music for your enjoyment.

Bertha Honore was born in Louisville, Kentucky in 1849. Her father was a businessman, and she inherited his administrative and political skills.

Bertha's family moved to Chicago when she was six. She met millionaire Potter Palmer in 1870 while shopping in his elegant department store, which carried everything from dry goods to the latest French fashions for ladies. The store was later sold to Marshall Field. Palmer

## A REMARKABLE WOMAN

**Bertha Honore Palmer,  
An Admirable Lady of  
the Club**

SHIRLEY BAUGHER, *Editor*

then opened his eponymous luxury hotel, Palmer House, and became a millionaire real estate investor. Bertha married him in 1870. She was twenty-one; he was forty-four.

Shortly after their marriage, the Chicago Fire destroyed the Palmer House and most of Palmer's holdings. With Bertha's help, he was able to re-establish credit, borrow money, and amass an even larger fortune. While Potter became one of the city's top businessmen, Bertha



Clockwise from top left

▶ Bertha Matilde Honore Palmer

▶ The Potter Palmer mansion at 1350 N. Lake Shore Drive  
"Sumptuous and abominable"

▶ The Gallery



rose to the top of Chicago society.

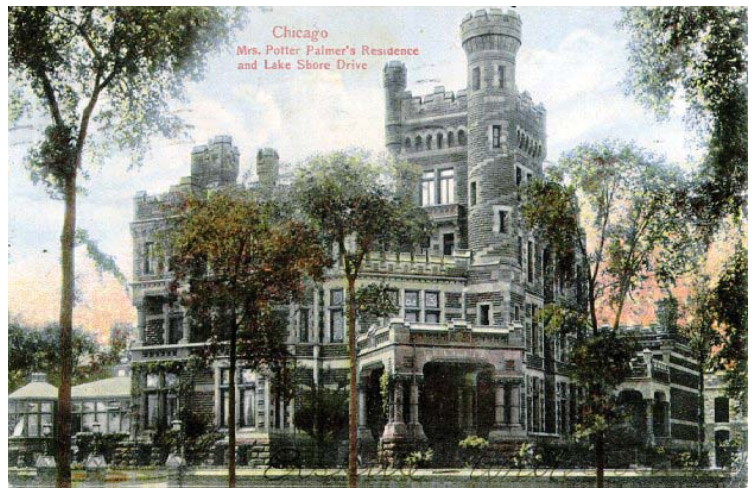
She was beautiful, smart, and absolutely sure of herself. The Palmers lived in their rebuilt hotel for a time, but decided to move from the central

city to the near North Side. They started construction of a mansion at 1350 N. Lake Shore Drive in 1882. By 1885, when it was completed, the social center of Chicago had moved to the "Gold Coast" neighborhood. Wealthy friends of the Palmers flocked to build houses nearby.

Critics called the Palmer mansion "sumptuous and abominable". Adorned with turrets and minarets on the exterior, the interior of the house featured a spiral staircase that rose eighty feet into a tower. There were two elevators, an Ottoman parlor, a Renaissance library, a Moorish-style bedroom, a Louis XV drawing room, and an English dining room that could seat fifty. It was the largest private residence in Chicago. The bills were so large that Palmer asked his architects to stop showing them to him.

### Bertha Palmer's art gallery

Bertha loved to entertain in the rooftop ballroom with its adjoining art gallery. She made frequent trips to Paris to shop and buy art. Her purchases included works by Impressionists Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and Edgar Degas. She also bought works from Mary Cassat, Camille Pissaro, Jean-Baptists Corot, and Alfred Sisley. Guests sought invitations to the Palmer's home just to see



the paintings. Much as she loved entertaining and welcoming friends to her home, Bertha treasured her privacy. There were no doorknobs on the outside of the house. If you were uninvited, you were unwanted.

Bertha Palmer was a notorious spendthrift, and her husband indulged her extravagances. Her jewelry was legendary. She once appeared on the luxury liner the S.S. Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse wearing a tiara of diamonds as large as lima beans, a corsage of panned diamonds, a diamond scepter, a bustier made entirely of diamonds, and ropes of pearls around her neck. When she walked into the salon, a singer from the Metropolitan Opera, who was giving a concert for the ship's guests, stopped right in the middle of a high note.

Her lavish style earned Bertha Palmer the treasured nickname, "Princess of the Prairie". Pot-

Continued on next page ▶

ter Palmer actually left a vast sum of money in his will to whoever married Bertha next. Asked why he would be so generous to his replacement he replied, “Because he’ll need it”. Actually, the bequest was unnecessary. Bertha never remarried after Palmer’s death.

### **An Advocate for Women’s Rights**

Bertha Honore Palmer was not just a socialite with an unlimited expense account. She was a social activist who advocated for the fair treatment of women and children, especially in hospitals, prisons, poorhouses, and neighborhoods that received little attention from city government. She belonged to the Chicago Women’s Club, a progressive organization dedicated to helping underprivileged women. She used her parlor to organize female factory workers and coordinate a strike against unfair owners. She was named Chairwoman of the Columbian Exposition’s Board of Lady Managers and supervised creation of a pavilion that celebrated the accomplishments of women worldwide. She served as de facto hostess for the City of Chicago during the Exposition, entertaining royalty and presidents who attended the event. She was there for the opening day and for the first official ride of the Ferris wheel.

Many social causes were the beneficiaries of Palmer’s philanthropy. She gave both money and personal support to Jane Addams’ Hull House settlement. She and Addams were early members of the Fortnightly of Chicago, which was founded in 1873. The group embodied the nineteenth century passion for self-improvement, and met regularly to research and present intellectually stimulating papers for each other’s enlightenment.

From 1892 to 1896, she was a trustee of Northwestern University. She became first vice president of the Chicago Civic Federation in 1893, and in 1900, she was the only woman appointed by President William McKinley as a commissioner to the Paris Exposition. When her husband died in 1902, Bertha took over management of his eight million dollar estate and doubled its value in her remaining years. When she died, she left more than \$15 million dollars to her two sons Honore and Potter Palmer, Jr. The boys sold the Chicago mansion at 1350 N. Lake Shore Drive to industrialist Vincent Hugo Bendix.

Bendix added many paintings to Bertha Palmer’s art collection and renamed the property the “Bendix Galleries”. He had planned to tear down the building and construct the world’s largest hotel on the site, but the project never materialized.

Sadly, no guests or art lovers can visit the Palmer mansion today. The building was demolished in 1950 and was replaced by a pair of 22-story high-rise apartment buildings. One can only imagine what Bertha would have thought about her privacy being invaded by 740 families.



◀ Diamond Bertha Palmer

▼ 1350-60 N. Lake Shore Drive today

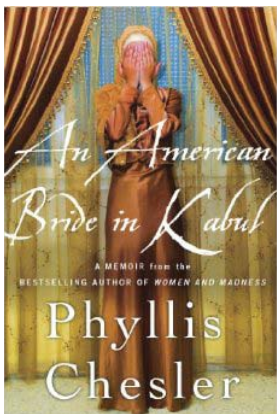




## The Reading Corner

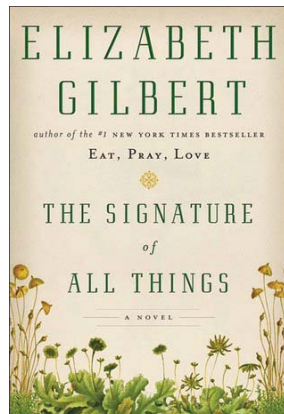
### *An American Bride in Kabul* Phyllis Chesler

Few westerners will ever be able to understand Muslim or Afghan society unless they are part of a Muslim family. Twenty years old and in love, Phyllis Chesler, a Jewish-American girl from Brooklyn, fell in love with and married a wealthy young Afghan with western views and a desire to reform his country. In 1961, he took her to Kabul where authorities confiscated her American passport. She became the property of her husband's family with no citizenship rights. Once back in Afghanistan, her husband reverted to traditional customs. Chesler found herself trapped in a polygamous family unable to escape. She fought against her seclusion, her lack of freedom, her Afghan family's attempts to convert her to Islam, and her husband's wish to tie her to the country through children. Chesler nearly died there before she managed to escape. Back in America, she became an activist for women's rights. Her book, *An American Bride in Kabul* tells how a naïve American girl learned to see the world through eastern, as well as western eyes.



### *The Signature of All Things* Elizabeth Gilbert

Elizabeth Gilbert (*Eat, Pray, Love*) gives us a fascinating story of love, adventure, and discovery. Spanning much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, her novel follows the fortunes of the Whittaker family, led by Henry, a poor Englishman who makes a fortune in the South American quinine trade and becomes the richest man in Philadelphia. Born in 1800, his daughter, Alma is an incredibly brilliant and very homely girl who becomes a botanist enthralled with the study of mosses. Her studies take her around the world from London, to Peru, to Tahiti, to Amsterdam, and beyond as she delves ever deeper into her work. She meets a number of fascinating characters on her journey: Tahitian women who gather by the river to wash their silken tresses, prostitutes who are all business, missionaries, abolitionists, astronomers, sea captains, madmen, and geniuses. She also makes a bizarre marriage to Ambrose Pike, a utopian artist who makes beautiful paintings of orchids—a profession that stands in direct opposition to her desire to understand the mysteries of evolution and the changing views of science, religion, commerce, and class. *Signature* is a fascinating story that is sure to capture the hearts and minds of readers.



### *The Book Thief* Markus Zusak

If you have not yet read this remarkable novel, run, do not walk, to pick up a copy. It is, quite simply, one of the best books I have ever read. First published in 2005, the book has won numerous awards and was on the New York Times' Best Seller list for over 230 weeks. The story takes place in Nazi Germany and is told by Death, who comments on the thoughts, morals, and actions of humanity throughout the story. In this beautiful piece of storytelling, we meet all kinds of Germans, from committed Nazis to Hans Huberman, a decorator and part-time accordion player who hides a Jew named Max Vandenburg in the basement of their home on Himmel Street, because Max's father had saved his life when both were German soldiers in the first world war. He and his wife Rosa have adopted a little girl named Liesel, the book thief of the title who was given up by a mother who could not afford to keep her. She brought with her a book she stole from her brother's gravesite, even though she was illiterate, *The Grave Digger's Handbook*. Hans finds the book hidden under her mattress and teaches her to read it. At a rally on 20 April, 1940, during the famous Nazi book burning, Liesel steals another book from the burning pile, and is seen by the Mayor's wife who invites



Continued on next page ►

the girl to use her library, which Liesel does, occasionally stealing one. She is abetted by her friend Rudy, a boy obsessed with the feats of black athlete Jesse Owens. As the Nazis continue to harass her family and friends, Liesel begins to write her life story in a little black book, which is lost in a bombing raid that kills most of the occupants of Himmel Street. Death picks up the souls of the dead, as well as Liesel's book. Death keeps a close eye on Liesel and comes for her at the end of her life, returning the little black book before she passes on. "Could you understand it?" she asks. "I am haunted by humans," Death says.

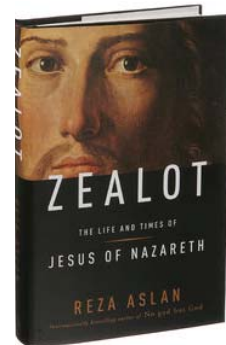
The *Book Thief* has been made into a movie starring Geoffrey Rush and Emily Watson as Hans and Rosa Huberman and Sophie Nelisse as Liesel. The film is directed by Brian Percival with a musical score by John Williams. It is scheduled for release on October 22.

### ***Zealot*** **Reza Aslan**

In *Zealot*, an examination of the life of Jesus of Nazareth, Mr. Aslan portrays Jesus as a Jewish zealot, a rebel against Rome and Roman agents in Palestine. Jesus grew up as a poor laborer and became a disciple of John the Baptist. He preached the imminent arrival of an earthly, political kingdom of God ruled by an anointed messiah. According to the author, he did not intend to found a church or a new religion. He did enter Jerusalem with his disciples and enact a violent cleansing of the Temple. Provoked by that action, the Romans crucified him as a rebel, a zealot, and a pretender to the Judean throne. One of the strengths of the book is its insight into the economics, politics, and religion of Palestine in the first century. Aslan describes how the Romans and Jewish upper class exploited the land

of the people and contributed to the harsh existence of the peasants and lower classes.

Some have unfairly criticized Aslan, a Muslim scholar, for writing a book about Jesus. This is no more controversial than a Christian scholar's writing about Islam. It happens all the time. Mr. Aslan is not a scholar of ancient Judaism or Christianity. He teaches creative writing, and he is a very good writer. *Zealot* is a fascinating read.



*Book Reviews by*  
SHIRLEY BAUGHER