



FRIENDS OF AMERICAN WRITERS



SEPTEMBER
2014–2015 NUMBER 1

CHICAGO
www.fawchicago.org

THE FORTNIGHTLY CLUB
OF CHICAGO
120 E. BELLEVUE PLACE

President's Message

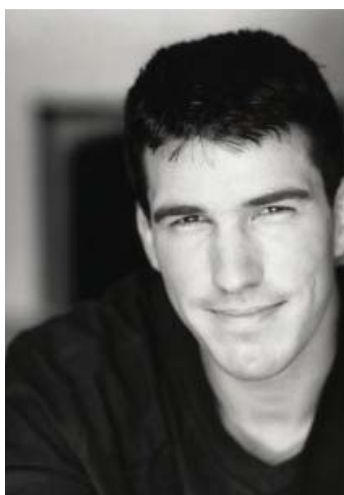
CHRISTINE BERN,
President

Welcome to the 2014 season of Friends of American Writers! Once again we have assembled an impressive group of women who serve as our Board of Directors and Committee Chairs. Women, like each of you, who share a genuine love of literature and dedication to Friends of American Writers. I thank Roberta Gates, Shirley Baugher and Lorraine Campione for their persistence this summer in putting together an exciting variety of programs for the upcoming season.

As we celebrate our 92st anniversary this year, we look forward to meeting our Scholarship Recipients in the fall, our Literary Award winners in May, an outstanding season of programs and the camaraderie we share as book lovers at the lovely Fortnightly Club. ■

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FAW Welcomes Author and TV Actor Benjamin Busch

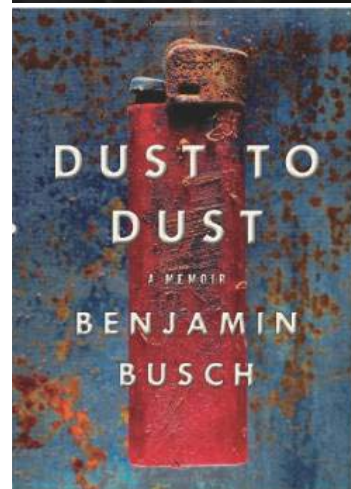


Benjamin Busch, Author: *Dust to Dust*
ROBERTA GATES, *Program Chair*

Friends of American Writers is pleased to kick off its ninety-second year with an appearance by Benjamin Busch, who is a television actor, visual artist, photographer and, last but not least, an emerging author of tremendous talent. *Dust to Dust*, his 2012 war memoir, was not only read and admired by FAW's awards committee, but received almost universal critical acclaim as well.

Busch, who is the son of the celebrated novelist, Frederick Busch, writes about his childhood in rural upstate New York where "he was drawn to the wilderness" and spent much of his time building backyard forts, digging trenches and roaming junkyards. Though his grandfathers had both seen combat during World War II, his parents were peaceniks who opposed the Vietnam War and refused to let their sons play with toy guns. But no matter: Benjamin made do with a maple-stick sword.

Busch studied visual arts at Vassar College, but as soon as he graduated he enlisted in the Marines. After his four-year stint, he continued to serve as a reservist, which led




to his being called up in 2003 and again in 2005. During his first tour in Iraq, he was the commanding officer of a light armored reconnaissance unit, while in his second tour he was part of a Civil Affairs team tasked with rebuilding an Iraqi town.

In between his two Iraqi tours, Busch played the part of Officer Anthony Colicchio on the celebrated HBO series *The Wire*. In addition,

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he's appeared in *Generation Kill*, also on HBO, and in episodes of *The West Wing*.

But Busch says he was an actor not only when the cameras were turned on him but also when he was working with Iraqis. Both, he says, required the skills of an actor, since in Iraq especially, it was important never to reveal the frustrations he was feeling.

Dust to Dust reflects a complicated relationship between destruction and creation, and many have compared it to Annie Dillard's *Tinker at Pilgrim Creek*. "It's impossible to read any part of this book and not be moved," wrote *The New York Journal of Books*, and we think you'll agree once you've met Benjamin Busch and heard him read from his beautifully written memoir. 



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Luncheon Reservations

Luncheon reservations for the September 10 meeting of the Friends of American Writers are due no later than 6:00 p.m. on Sunday, September 5. Please note that this deadline is firm, and no reservations will be accepted following this date and time. To reserve, please call only Lorraine Campione (772-275-5118) or Vivian Mortensen (847-827-8339).

Luncheon will be served at 12:00 noon in the main floor dining room of the Fortnightly Club of Chicago, 120 E. Bellevue Place. The cost of the luncheon is \$40 payable by cash or check to FAW in the front lobby on the day of the luncheon. Discount parking for FAW luncheon guests is available in the lot just west of the Fortnightly at 100 E. Bellevue Place. If you are reserving for a group, we ask that only one person make the group request to avoid confusion. Please note: if you make a reservation and find you cannot attend, you must cancel no later than 6:00 p.m. on the Sunday preceding the meeting.

Reservations not cancelled must be paid for by the member.

Juvenile Committee to Host Book Sales

Tanya Klasser, Juvenile Awards Committee Chair, has announced that her committee will hold a book sale at the November and March luncheon meetings. Books submitted to the committee by authors of juvenile books will be available for sale. The books are offered at bargain prices and make wonderful holiday gifts—or gifts for any time of year. Do plan to take advantage of this opportunity.

Literary Committee Would Welcome Readers

Tammie Bob, Literary Awards Committee Co-Chair, has indicated that the group would welcome some additional readers. As you may know, hundreds of books are submitted annually by Midwest authors for FAW award consideration. All of these books must be read and reviewed by members of the committee, which can be a daunting task. If you would like to participate in the reading and selection process, please contact Tam-

mie Bob, Bobtam410@gmail.com or (630)858-1582.

Dues Reminder

We know it's an oversight, but many of you have not yet paid your 2013-14 dues. If you have not already done so, please send your payment to the FAW treasurer Eileen McNulty, 4450 N. Kostner, Chicago, IL 60630-4102. The annual dues are \$45. The absolute deadline for receipt of payment is October 1, 2014.

2013-14 Meeting Dates for Friends of American Writers

Wednesday, September 10, 2014
Wednesday, October 8, 2014
Wednesday, November 12, 2014
Wednesday, December 10, 2014
Wednesday, January 14, 2015
Wednesday, February 11, 2015
Wednesday, March 11, 2015
Wednesday, April 8, 2015
Wednesday, May 13, 2015

Please mark your calendars.

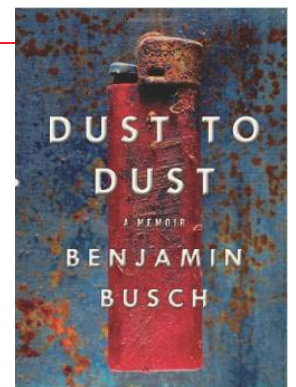
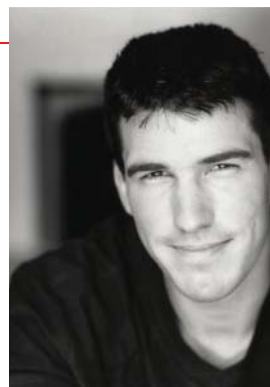
Directory Distribution

The 2014-15 FAW Directories will be distributed to members in October. 

U P C O M I N G F A W P R O G R A M S

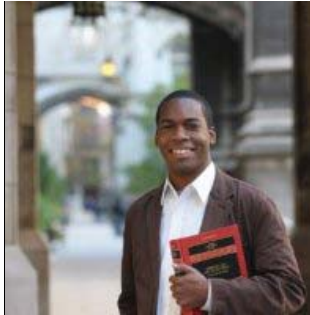
Program chair, Roberta Gates and her committee have put together an outstanding schedule for the 2014-2014 year. It includes:

September 10: Author Benjamin Busch,
author, *Dust to Dust*



October 8:
Attorney Paxton Williams as George Washington Carver

Dr. Paxton Williams ▶



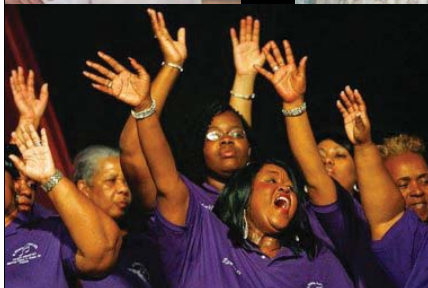
November 12:
Celebrity Chef Gale Gand

Chef Gale Gand ▶



December 10:
Hermon Baptist Church Choir

Hermon Baptist Church Choir ▶



January 14:
Melanie Benjamin,
 author
The Aviator's Wife

Melanie Benjamin ▶



February 11:
An Evening with Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln,
 a one-act play
 presented by
Max and Donna Daniels

◀ Max and Donna Daniels



March 11:
Agatha Christie,
 as presented by
Betsey Means

◀ Betsey Means as Agatha Christie



April 8:
Kelly O'Connor McNees,
 author,
The Lost Summer of Louisa May Alcott

◀ Kelly O'Connor McNees



FEATURE **LIVING WITH HISTORY**
Take Care of This House

*Take care of this house,
 Be always on call,
 For this house is the home of us all.*

ALAN JAY LERNER

Both Abigail Adams and her husband John Adams, the second President of the United States, left the White House in 1801 with this admonishment: "Take care of this house." President Adams added

"I pray Heaven to bestow the best of blessings on this House and all that shall hereafter inhabit it. May none but honest and wise men ever rule under this roof."

Far from 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, on a little street in Chicago's Old Town neighborhood, there is another house that has become part of our architectural heritage. It is the little yellow house at 216 Menomonee Street. Recently the

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216 W.
Menomonee,
1874



subject of a *New York Times* feature article, “Treating His House Like a Museum” (August 7, 2014), the cottage is the home of another prominent man—though not the President of the United States. Owner David Hawkanson is the executive director of the acclaimed Steppenwolf Theater Company, and he is charged with taking care of his house. He acknowledges, “You come to understand that you are not the owner, just the steward.”

216 Menomonee Street

The tiny cottage that occupies this address was built in 1874, three years after the Great Chicago Fire. In the Landmark District of Old Town, the house is categorized as “significant”. One might wonder why such a modest little place deserves a “significant” designation. It is partly because of its design and construction and partly because it is classified as a fire relief shanty, meaning it was built with funds and materials supplied by the Fire Relief and Aid Society established in 1871 to help families whose houses were destroyed by the fire. Very few of these remain nearly 150 years later.

The Society sold plans and materials for cottages of two sizes, each consisting of two rooms—actually one large room and a divider. The smaller of the two measured 12’ x 16’. It cost \$75 and was meant to house a family of three. The larger plan, selling for \$100, measured 20’ x 16’ and was intended for families of more than three. The cottage at 216 W. Menomonee fell into the latter category. The plan came complete with lumber framing and boards, felt lining for the inside walls, a double iron chimney, two four-paneled doors, three windows, and a partition that could be placed wherever the occupants chose.

Frederick Wacker home 1874

More than 5,200 of these cottages were constructed. They employed balloon frame construction and were put together at a central location—to be moved by wagon wherever the owner chose. The first owner of 216 was a Mr. Hambrock who built it in 1874—three years after the fire. While the original cottage contained only two rooms, it was enlarged many times through the years. A kitchen was added in 1900, a bathroom and garage in the 1930s, and another bedroom about 1970.

When Hambrock moved his house to Menomonee, ashes from the fire remained on the nearly-empty street. The area was still mostly farmland inhabited by German laborers—a carryover from its “Cabbage Patch” days. In the next several years, more people moved into the area, and its demographic changed from being an almost exclusively German community to becoming a mix of European immigrants. It also lost its working class identity, as a sea captain, a beer tycoon, a real estate mogul, and a trader in gold and grain moved in. Famed Chicago architect Louis Sullivan built a series of rowhouses, intended as income properties for Ann Halsted, widow of Henry Halsted, a “vessel agent” with a LaSalle Street firm. In 1874, Frederick Wacker, a wealthy real estate developer, built the neighborhood’s only mansion just around the corner from the little house at 216.

All are still standing and are the subjects of year-round architectural and historic district tours. And all are meticulously maintained by their current owners. But none is so revered by Old Town residents, architectural historians, and, of course, by its current caretaker as the little yellow fire relief cottage resting comfortably between its more imposing neighbors in the middle of Menomonee Street—defying time and change. 🏠



The Reading Corner

All the Light We Cannot See

By Anthony Doerr

The problem with reading a really good book is you cannot put it down. Which means, you will leave undone all the things you ought to be doing just to finish the book. Another problem is that once you have finished, you will be reluctant to start another book, because you know it won't be as good. Anthony Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See* is a really good book—in my opinion, a great one. The language is exquisite and the story hauntingly beautiful. The two main characters begin as children caught up in the horror of World War II. One is Marie-Laure LeBlanc, a blind girl whose father oversees all the locks in the Museum of Natural History in Paris. After his daughter loses her sight at the age of six, he is determined that she will not become a recluse and builds a wooden scale model of all the places she must go, and she learns to navigate the streets in her Paris quartier by feeling and memorizing them. To further sharpen his daughter's mind, M. Le Blanc gives Marie-Laure puzzle boxes on her birthday in which he has hidden gifts and admonishes her that she must pay attention to every little detail in order to uncover the gifts. Heeding this admonishment will later become key to her sur-

vival. He also gives her a fictional world to navigate, a Braille edition of Jules Verne's "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea."

The other main character is Werner Pfennig, an orphan living in a state-supported house in a small German coal-mining village. All of the men in the village work in the mines—a fate destined to be Werner's until his passion for science and uncanny understanding of circuitry earn him a place at an elite Nazi training school. It also helps that his hair is whiter than any of the 60-odd shades of blond on the examiner's chart and that his eyes are a superior shade of blue. When he leaves the school, he goes to the Wehrmacht where he is tasked with finding and killing members of the resistance who are sending illegal radio transmissions. At first, Werner is drawn into Hitler's spell, but as the war drags on and atrocities mount, disillusionment sets in and he loses faith in the promise of a brave new world.

Underlying the stories of Marie-Laure and Werner is the existence of a priceless blue diamond known as the Sea of Flames, which is kept in a secret vault at the Paris Museum. The diamond supposedly endows its keeper with eternal life but curses everyone around him with misfortune and death. Of course, the Nazis want the diamond for Hitler's museum that is to house all of Europe's looted art treasures. The director has three copies of

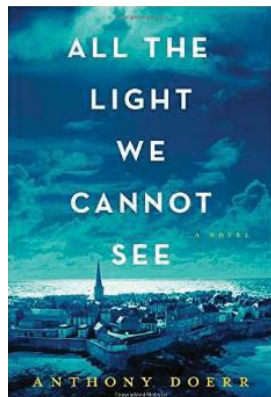
the diamond made and entrusts them to three handlers. One stone is kept hidden in the museum. No one knows which is real. Marie-Laure's father is one of the keepers.

He takes his daughter and the stone to the home of his nephew Etienne in Saint-Malo where he conceals it in another model he makes of Etienne's house and the surrounding streets. Again he tells his daughter to pay attention to the details. One day, he is arrested by the Germans and is never seen again. Meanwhile, a Nazi treasure hunter, searching for the Sea of Flames draws ever closer to the house in Saint-Malo.

Inevitably the lives of Marie-Laure and Werner intersect. In 1944, when the Americans invade the beaches at Normandy, Werner finds himself in Saint Malo. He discovers a cleverly concealed radio wire going down a chimney from Etienne's house and realizes messages are being sent from there. He stations himself outside the house, and when Marie-Laure goes out, he follows her. He is so drawn to her appearance and her ability to navigate her way around the neighborhood, he does not report his finding. He goes into the house after it has been bombed hoping to find her alive. He does. They talk, and Werner learns that Marie's grandfather was the voice he heard on a broken short wave radio he had found and repaired as a child. Talking about science, the voice asked, "What do we call visible light? We call it color. But really, children, mathematically, all of light is invisible." That voice drew Werner to science and shaped his life.

Doerr's structure is magical. He cuts back and forth in time and between characters, disclosing information little by little, until the last puzzle box slides open and all of its secrets are revealed.

Do yourself a favor, read this book. You will not read a better novel this year.



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CHICAGO AUTHOR **Ben Hoffman Wins NELSON ALGREN 2014 SHORT STORY AWARD**

AUTHOR BEN HOFFMAN received the news that he had been selected as the winner of the 2014 Nelson Algren Short Story Award on his wedding day. He wisely remarked that it was the second best thing that happened to him that day. Hoffman's grand-prize winning piece, "This Will All Be Over Soon," was selected from among 2,400 entries and carries a \$3,500 cash prize. The four finalists will receive \$1,000 each. A graduate of Tufts University and the University of North Carolina, Hoffman has won many awards for his stories. His first chapter book was published in March. He and his wife will be moving to Madison, Wisconsin soon where he has received a fellowship at the University of Wisconsin.

"This Will All Be Over Soon" stretches credulity—as it is supposed to do. It follows a man whose wife was kidnapped by a

neighbor. When the story opens, she has been held captive in the neighbor's house for nearly a year. A SWAT team sits out front playing cards, and gawkers gather daily across the street to take selfies of the bizarre situation. The husband makes a pilgrimage to the house every day looking in vain to find his wife in a window or on the deck. Nothing. The bizarre thing is that nothing changes and nothing is done. Members of the SWAT team make no attempt to penetrate the house or rescue the woman. One team replaces another, and they all just sit, wait, and advise the husband to be patient, because, "this will all be over soon."

As the story progresses, the wife of the kidnapper insinuates herself into the lives of the husband and his daughter—sewing costumes, making meals, watching television, and talking.

The daughter begins hearing her mother's voice telling what is going on in her life. This is not possible, because there is no phone service to the house, and no other means of communication. But the daughter is adamant—and credible. So does she, or doesn't she hear what she reports. Ultimately, the reader has to determine the answer, and make sense of what makes no sense at all.

I must confess, while I admired the author's story-telling skills, and his ability to concoct interesting characters and an offbeat plot, I did not like the piece. After plodding through the interminable waiting, I wanted a resolution—any resolution; it didn't come. I recommend it because I believe you might want to know what's going on in the world of the short story. Next month, I will review one of the runners-up: "The Book of Locusts." ■