

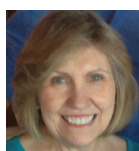


OCTOBER NEWSLETTER
2016-2017 NUMBER 2

Editor: Shirley Baugher
Designer: Norman Baugher

FRIENDS OF AMERICAN WRITERS CHICAGO

www.fawchicago.org



President's Message

ROBERTA GATES, *President*

Readers & Reviewers debut

I am very pleased to announce that Readers & Reviewers, our new book discussion group, will have its debut from 11 to 11:45 a.m. on November 9 right before our luncheon at The Fortnightly. Serving as facilitator will be our own Shirley Baugher.

Shirley has chosen *A Great Reckoning* by Louise Penney for our first book because it's not just a mystery, but a mystery with really great characters and a terrific setting. As a matter of fact, Shirley says that she'd move to Three Pines in Québec,

Canada, if it were a real place. It isn't, but you can go there by reading this best-selling book and then joining the discussion on November 9.

Please RSVP Shirley, though, if you plan to attend, either by emailing her at shirleyba@rcn.com or calling her at (312) 787-7025.


Recognition of sustaining clubs

During October we'll be honoring our sustaining clubs: the Flossmoor Book Club, the Ogden Dunes Book Club and The Woman's Reading Club of Riverside. All are longtime sustaining clubs, and we hope to see as many of their members as possible.

We are always looking for new clubs, so if you belong to a book club,

talk to your members about becoming a sustaining club. Club membership costs no more than an individual membership—just \$45—and anyone belonging to a sustaining club can attend two FAW meetings a year, even without being an individual member.

Recognition of past presidents

In addition to recognizing our sustaining clubs in October, we'll also be honoring our past presidents. Since 1922, when FAW was incorporated, the club has had 51 presidents, not counting myself, and it is thanks to these ladies that Friends of American Writers continues to be a viable organization 94 long years after its inception! 

OCTOBER PROGRAM

Readings and Songs of Carl Sandburg

Mark Dvorak, Old Town School of Folk Music

Vivian Mortenson

The Old Town School of Folk Music's Mark Dvorak presents a mix of traditional folk songs preserved by Illinois' own Carl Sandburg, and selections from the Pulitzer Prize winning author and poet. This tribute provides a compelling and entertaining musical tribute of Americana and the Midwestern heartland.

For those who don't know, Carl Sandburg was given an FAW award in 1933. We are honoring him as a former award winner and outstanding American poet.

About Mark Dvorak

Mark Dvorak was born on Chicago's southwest side. He became interested in folk music after reading a biography of Bob Dylan in high school. From Dylan, he moved on to the songs of Woody Guthrie, Lead Belly and Pete Seeger. He purchased his first acoustic guitar while working in a xylophone factory in LaGrange, Illinois, and enrolled in classes at Chicago's Old Town School of Folk Music.

In 1981 he performed at the Fox Valley Folk Festival in Geneva, Illinois and later that year opened "The Old Quarter Coffee House." Three years later, the very successful "Old Quarter" was booking national acts and hosting classes and workshops.



Mark Dvorak

Continued 

After a successful six-year run, “The Old Quarter” was reorganized as the non-profit Plank Road Folk Music Society, which is still operating. Dvorak spent six years on the board of Plank Road, wrote and edited the newsletter, served two terms as its president. He still remains close to the organization.

In 1982, Dvorak borrowed a five string banjo and taught himself how to play. In 1986, he joined the faculty of the Old Town School of Folk Music in Chicago and soon became a fixture on the Chicago acoustic scene, collaborating with such popular folk music icons Win Stracke, Frank Hamilton, and Eddie Holstein. Dvorak continues to serve as an artist-in-residence on the Old Town School faculty.

In the summer of 1990, Dvorak went to Louisiana to visit the grave of Huddie Ledbetter, known the world over as “Lead Belly.” He chronicled this trip in a 1993 documentary, “Lead Belly’s Legacy.” The show aired in 160 cities and earned Dvorak a Peter Lisagor Award for journalism.

In 1995, he released his first CD “Old Songs & New People”. The recording was a big success. It won the Parents’ Choice Gold Medal Award and led to hundreds of nationwide performances. By 1998, Dvorak had performed at venues throughout the Midwest and the east coast. He released his classic “The Streets of Old Chicago,” which documented his experiences performing and teaching in Chicago. 1998 also marked the beginning of a

long collaboration between Dvorak, song writer Michael Smith, and singer Barbara Barrow. Between 1999 and 2007, the trio toured the country with “WeaverMania! LIVE.” which celebrated the sounds and songs of the legendary Weavers. In 2005, Dvorak recorded “Every Step of the Way.” The recording contained ten of Dvorak’s original numbers and established his song writing career.

“What a Wonderful World,” released in 2008, was a compilation of material from Dvorak’s earlier CDs. It included a four-song collaboration with Chicago’s Sons of the Never Wrong. That same year, Dvorak received the Woodstock Folk Festival’s Lifetime Achievement Award for his work as a performer, song writer, teacher, and folk historian.

In the spring of 2011, Dvorak released his biggest hit recording: “Time Ain’t Got Nothin’ on Me.” It rose to number fourteen on the Folk DJ chart, and made it to number twenty-three on the Cashbox National Folk Chart. The disc contained twelve Dvorak originals and featured a Chicago all-star cast of singers and instrumentalists.

In 2012, WFMT’s Rich Warren, host of “The Midnight Special,” named Dvorak “Chicago’s official troubadour.” The next year, Dvorak published his first collection of essays and poems, *Bowling for Christmas and Other Tales from the Road*. The book sold out of its initial printing in nine days. After 30 years as a touring musician, educator, and community builder, Dvorak continues to perform more than 200 dates a year. ■■



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Luncheon Reservations

Luncheon reservations for the October 12, 2016 meeting of the Friends of American Writers are due no later than 6:00 on Sunday, October 8. Please be advised, this deadline is firm. No reservations will be accepted following this date and time. To reserve, please contact only Lorraine Campione (773-275-5118) or Pat Adelberg (847-588-0911). 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 \$45 payable by check (preferred) in the front lobby on the day of the meeting. (Due to rising costs of food and service, it is necessary to raise the price of the luncheon from \$40 to \$45. We hope this is not an inconvenience to our members.) 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. Parking is available in the parking lot at 100 E. Bellevue Place. Beginning with the October 12 FAW meeting, members may make standing reservations for the remainder of the 2016-17 year. Simply advise Pat or Lorraine of your wish to do so.

Literature Awards Committee

TAMMIE BOB, *Chair*

Tammie announced that the first meeting of the Literature Awards Committee, now comprised of 13 members, will take place at the Women’s Athletic Club on Michigan Avenue and Ontario Street on

Wednesday, September 21, at 11:00 p.m. To date, 11 books have been received with many more expected in the coming weeks.

Tammie also noted the inclusion of an article about George Hodgman in the July/August edition of the “Poets and Writers Literary Magazine.” As many of you will remember, George is the FAW award-winning author of *Bettyville*.

He is a magazine and book editor who has worked at Simon and Schuster, Vanity Fair, and Talk magazine. Both Hodgman and *Bettyville* were the subjects of a recent “Sunday Morning” feature on CBS.

Young People’s Literature Awards Committee

MARTI DANIEL, *Chair*

The Young People’s Literature Awards Committee held its first meet-

ing on September 7, 2016 at Bistro Margot restaurant with five members in attendance. Henceforth, the group will meet at Marti Daniel's apartment at 10:30 a.m. This committee has received 30 books as of early September. Another ten books will arrive following their fall publication dates. Marti noted that there is a good balance of UA, MG, and Picture books. She indicated that she has received excellent cooperation from both publishers and agents who wish to have their writers' works in contention. There will be a book sale for last year's submissions at the November 9 meeting. This will be an excellent opportunity to purchase books as holiday gifts for your young friends and relatives.

FAW Programs 2016-17

For those of you who might have missed the listing of upcoming FAW programs for the coming year. Please note the change for the April meeting. I had mistakenly entered April 17 as the date for that meeting. The date is April 12, 2017. I do apologize for the error. Here are the corrected offerings.

September 14, 2016

INA PICKNEY, *Restaurateur, Cookbook Author and Tribune Columnist*

October 12, 2016

MARK DVORAK, *Old Town School of Folk Music. Readings and Songs of Carl Sandburg*

November 9, 2016

SARA PARETSKY, *Chicago Mystery Writer and 1983 FAW Award Winner*

December 14, 2016

SOUNDS OF SWEETNESS. *Male A Cappella Choir of Walter Payton College Prep High School*

January 11, 2017

STEPHEN KLEIMAN, *Inside Scoop on how "West Side Story" was written and produced*

February 8, 2017

DAN CRAWFORD, *The Newbery Library—Its Sale and Collections*

March 8, 2017

BETSY MEANS, *A Portrait of Gertrude Stein*

April 12, 2017

ELIZABETH BERG, *Chicago Author of 24 books—The Story Behind the Stories*

May 12, 2017

AWARDS LUNCHEON

Mark your calendars. You won't want to miss any of these outstanding programs

A Special Thank You

I would be remiss if I didn't extend a special "thank you" to our September presenter, the incomparable Ina Pinkney. I think I can state without qualification that Ina is one of the best speakers we have ever had at the Friends of American Writers. She is smart, witty, articulate, and engaging. Every story in her repertoire touched us

personally, and when she finished, she received a standing ovation. I know I am not the only one who didn't want the presentation to end. So thank you, Ina. Come back to us soon.

Congratulations are in order for Pat Adelberg and her very competent committee for compiling and publishing another outstanding yearbook. Pat distributed these at the September meeting. If you missed receiving yours, they will be available at subsequent meetings. Well done, Pat.

New Faces

Those of you who attended the September luncheon might have noticed two new faces at the reception desk. Jean Peraino and Luana Kirby will now be greeting you when you arrive and will take your money and advise you of your assigned table seating. Welcome ladies. We look forward to seeing your smiling faces each second Wednesday.

Membership

This is just a friendly reminder to those of you who might not have renewed your membership. Please do so as soon as possible. You don't want to miss out on any of the outstanding upcoming programs or the opportunity to mingle with friends at one of the most beautiful venues in the city. ■■



FEATURE ARTICLE

by Shirley Baugher

He was one of the greatest and most controversial American writers of the twentieth century.

YOU MUST REMEMBER HIM EDWARD ALBEE

Together with Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, he ruled the American theater scene for more than 50 years. He was Edward Albee, and he died on Friday, September 16, at the age of 88.

Continued ►

About Edward Albee

Edward Albee was born in Washington, D.C. in 1928. His birth parents are unknown. He was adopted by Reed A. Albee and his wife when he was just a few weeks old. Reed Albee owned a chain of theatres, which he later sold to R.K.O. The Albees were a well-to-do family who treated their son with a kind of benign neglect. His father had little or nothing to do with his upbringing, and his mother was more focused on herself and her horses than on young Edward. She treated her son as something of an accessory to her self-centered life. Albee once remarked that he felt like an interloper in the Albee's home. Mrs. Albee was so disinterested in Edward's writing that she threw out his first play, written when he was fourteen years old, declaring it not worthy to be read. Many of Albee's female characters were modeled after her.

At best, the Albees gave their son a good education. He went to Valley Forge Military Academy in Pennsylvania and to Choate where he was very happy. He then went on to Trinity College in Hartford where he was not so happy. After a year and a half, the college suggested he not come back—ostensibly because he refused to go to chapel. That was fine with Edward. By then, he knew he wanted to be a writer, an occupation his parents could not condone. In his own words, they wanted "...somebody who would be a corporate thug—or perhaps a lawyer or doctor. But they didn't want a writer on their hands. Good God, no."

There was another issue. Albee was gay. He said he knew he was gay from the time he was eight years old and that he had his first homosexual experience at the age of twelve. Gay was not a life style the Albees would ever accept. Albee moved to Greenwich Village in 1949 where his artistic life really began. He mingled with the playwright William Inge and composers David Diamond, Aaron Copeland, and William Flanagan, who became his partner. After he left home, Edward never saw his father again; and he had no real contact with his mother until a few years before her death.

Becoming Edward Albee, Playwright

In New York, Albee supported himself with menial jobs until he could establish a literary career. The Off Broadway theater was just beginning in 1949, and Edward started attending plays. Since the admission was only a dollar, he was able to go as frequently as he wished. He immersed himself in the works of Beckett, Ionesco, Pirandello, and Brecht and began developing a sense of who he could become as a writer.

He started writing short stories but soon gave that up. He turned to poetry which he also gave up. He never really felt like a poet—more like someone who wrote poetry. Still, he knew he was a writer, so he turned to the one thing he had not done—a play. He called it "The Zoo Story," and wrote it on a typewriter he borrowed from the Western Union office where he worked as a messenger. He completed it in less than three weeks

"Zoo Story, a one-act play, concerns two characters, Peter and Jerry, who meet on a park bench in New York City's Central Park. Peter is a middle-class publishing executive with a wife, two daughters, two cats and two parakeets. Jerry is an isolated and disheartened man, desperate to have a meaningful conversation with another human being. Jerry approaches Peter who is sitting on a bench and says "I've been to the zoo. Mister, I've been to the zoo."

He proceeds to intrude on Peter's peaceful state by interrogating him and forcing him to listen to stories about his life and the reason behind his visit to the zoo. Eventually, Peter has had enough of this strange person and tries to leave. Jerry begins pushing Peter off the bench and challenges him to fight for his territory. Unexpectedly, Jerry pulls a knife on Peter, and then drops it on the bench and gestures for Peter to grab it. When Peter picks up the weapon, Jerry charges him and impales himself on the knife. Bleeding on the park bench, Jerry finishes his zoo story by saying, "Could I have planned all this. No... no, I couldn't have. But I think I did." Horrified, Peter runs away from Jerry, whose dying words are, "Oh...my...God."

"Zoo Story" opened in Berlin in September 1959 in German translation—where it was well received. Albee encountered stiff opposition when he tried to take it to New York, however. The play was rejected by a number of producers before the Actors Studio agreed to a single performance. As luck would have it, Norman Mailer was in the audience for that performance and said afterwards, "It was the best one-act play I've ever seen."

That one performance was good enough to earn "Zoo Story" a commercial run at the Provincetown Playhouse in January 1960, where it received mixed reviews. New York Times' theater critic Brooks Atkinson wrote that the play was "...consistently interesting and illuminating—odd and pithy." But he concluded that "...nothing of enduring value was said."

Nonetheless, the play attracted a great deal of attention, and Albee became known as a new kind of playwright, a nihilist. In "Zoo Story," Albee established a defining style. He wanted his work to challenge theatergoers, to confront them with situations and ideas that would take them out of their comfort zones. "I want the

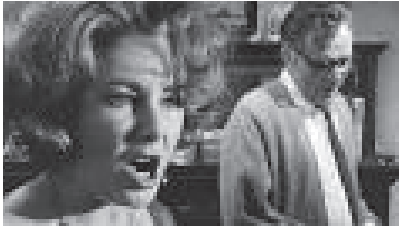


Zoo Story—"Mister, I've been to the zoo."

audience to run out of the theater,” he said. “Then I want them to come back and see the play again.”

From “Zoo Story” to “Virginia Woolf”

Albee followed “Zoo Story” with three more successful Off Broadway one-act plays: “The Sandbox”, “The American Dream,” both about toxic family relationships, and “The Death of Bessie Smith.” Then came the play for



Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton
George and Martha: sad, sad, sad

which Albee will always be remembered: “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?”—the story of George, a disillusioned college history professor, and his wife Martha (a character drawn from Albee’s own mother) the president’s

daughter. Also part of the drama are Nick and Honey, two campus newcomers. The action encompasses a long night’s encounter between the couples during which some terrible psychological games are played and many devastating secrets come to light. It is quintessential Albee fare: frightening, disturbing, and acutely uncomfortable. The critical response was mixed. *The Daily Mirror* called it “...a sick play for sick people.” *The Daily News* described it as three and a half hours long, four characters wide, and a cesspool deep. But others were dazzled. A jury awarded it the Pulitzer Prize, but the Pulitzer advisory board refused to honor the recommendation, choosing not to give a drama award that year. The jurors resigned in protest.

In the more than fifty years since the play’s first appearance, it has become an American classic. It has been revived on Broadway three times and was made into an Academy Award winning film directed by Mike Nichols and starring Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor. Thirty years after the movie was made, Albee wrote that “Woolf hung about my neck like a shining medal of some sort—really nice, but a trifle onerous.”

There was a lot of speculation about the title of the play, which Albee himself cleared up years later. He recalled a saloon on Tenth Street in New York, between Greenwich Avenue and Waverly Place, that had a big mirror on the downstairs bar on which people scrawled graffiti. “At one point,” he said, “back in about 1953 or 1954—long before any of us started doing much of anything—I was in there having a beer one night, and I saw ‘Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf’ scrawled in soap on this mirror. When I started to write the play, it cropped up in my mind again. And, of course, who’s afraid of Virginia Woolf means who’s afraid of the big, bad wolf; who’s afraid of living life without false illusions. And it did strike me as being a rather typical university, intellectual joke.” Interestingly, Albee has the characters singing the words as a little ditty throughout the play. At the end,

when George and Martha have sung it one last time, Martha looks at George sadly and murmurs, “I am.”

Going Out of Style

As often happens with artists who achieve great success at the beginning of their careers, Albee was very productive through the 1960s and early 1970s. But following his early successes, he went into a period of decline, due in part to his struggles with alcohol. He did not write a commercially successful play for nearly twenty years. He did have a series of flops that opened and quickly closed on Broadway. “The Lady from Dubuque,” a drama about the nature of identity and death, was savaged by the critics and closed after twelve performances. “The Man Who Had Three Arms,” suffered a similar fate. This play takes place in a theatre where the main character, Himself, speaks to the audience about his life as a celebrity. He describes his transformation from a successful family man to a person who is horrified to discover that a third arm is growing from between his shoulder blades. He goes on the show business circuit and is undone by the money, sex, and adulation that go along with being a celebrity. He goes deeply in debt, his wife leaves him, and he falls apart in front of the audience.

The play, which satirizes the Catholic Church, the excesses of the culture of celebrity, and the shallowness of parent/child relationships; involves some interaction between Himself and the audience and contains a lot of humor and vulgar language. Both audiences and critics hated it, and the play failed miserably.

Following the failure of “The Man with Three Arms,” Albee moved to a TriBeCa loft and surrounded himself with African sculptures and paintings by successful contemporary artists—perhaps for inspiration. He kept a low profile until the early 1990s when he returned to Broadway with the very successful “Three Tall Women.” The protagonist of this play is a compelling 90-year old woman who, reflects on her life with a mixture of shame, pleasure, regret, and satisfaction. She recalls the fun of her childhood and her early marriage, when she felt an overwhelming optimism. She also bitterly recalls negative events that caused her regret: her husband’s affairs and death and the estrangement of her gay son. Clearly Albee was working through some troubled memories of his own. Albee admitted to *The Economist* that the play “was a kind of exorcism. And I didn’t end up any more fond of the woman (his mother) after I finished it than when I started.”

Besides exorcising personal demons, Albee regained the respect of New York theater critics with the play. Many of them thought that the playwright, who showed such promise during the 1960s and 1970s, had dried up creatively. By way of retribution, *Three Tall Women* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1994, as well as the Drama Critics Circle, Lucille Lortel, and Outer Critics Circle awards for best play.

Continued ►



SHIRLEY BAUGHER
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Edward Albee regained his rightful place as one of the American theater's preeminent dramatists and turned out provocative work for the next 20 years, including "The Goat," and "The Play About Baby." He also witnessed, and often directed, revivals of his earlier Broadway plays. He referred to this period as his "sunset success."

A few years ago, when he believed the end was near, Albee wrote a farewell note and stipulated that it should only be released at the time of his death:

To all of you who have made my being alive so wonderful, so exciting, and so full; my thanks and all my love."

Edward Albee, In His Own Words

In lieu of a book review this month, it seems only fitting to include some memorable quotes from this iconic playwright.

Good writers define reality; bad ones merely restate it. A good writer turns fact into truth; a bad writer will, more often than not, accomplish the opposite.

SATURDAY REVIEW, 1966

You gotta have swine to show you where the truffles are.

"Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?"

If you have no wounds, how can you know if you're alive.

"The Play About Baby"

What I mean by an educated taste is someone who has the same tastes that I have.

Unless you are terribly, terribly careful, you run the danger—without even know it is happening to you—of slipping into the fatal error of reflecting the public taste instead of creating it. Your responsibility is to the public consciousness, not to the public view of itself.

Sometimes, a person has to go a very long distance out of his way to come back a short distance correctly.

The Zoo Story

Sincerity doesn't mean anything. A person can be sincere and be more destructive than a person who is insincere.

WAGNER LITERARY MAGAZINE, 1962

I don't feel that catharsis in a play necessarily takes place during the course of a play. Often, it should take place afterward,

I have a fine sense of the ridiculous, but no sense of humor.

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf

Dashed hoped and good intentions. Good, better, best, bested.

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf

Being different is...interesting; there's nothing implicitly inferior or superior about it. Great difference, of course, produces natural caution; and if the differences are too extreme—well, then, reality tends to fade away.

Seascape

And so, Edward Albee, Good-bye. And Thank you. Thank you very much. ■■