



**FEBRUARY** NEWSLETTER  
2017-2018 NUMBER 6

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*Designer: Norman Baugher*

# FRIENDS OF AMERICAN WRITERS CHICAGO

[www.fawchicago.org](http://www.fawchicago.org)



## President's Message

ROBERTA GATES, *President*

The encouragement of new and promising authors is at the heart of what FAW has been doing since 1928. Over the years, we've given more than \$200,000 to emerging authors, many of whom have gone on to have stellar careers, including: Carl Sandburg (1933), William Maxwell (1938), Wendell Berry (1975), Toni Morrison (1978), Jane Smiley (1982), Sara Paretsky (1985), Larry Watson (1994), Ted Kooser (2003) and Gillian Flynn (2007).

Last year we gave away \$9,000 in prize money, and this year we hope to make it at least \$10,000. Since many of our winners have to travel from faraway cities to be at our awards luncheon,

their prize money is often eaten up by expenses. To keep that from happening, and as a way of encouraging our winners to come to the luncheon, we need to increase the prize money we're offering.

So think about doubling or tripling the gift you gave last year, or if that's not possible, then tack on an extra 20%. And if you haven't been a Patron before, or somehow meant to give last year but didn't, then this is your chance! Every donation of every size is appreciated, and 100% of whatever you give will go straight to the authors themselves.

And now, thanks to Karen Baker, our web manager, you can donate online. Just go to "[www.fawchicago.org](http://www.fawchicago.org)" and click on the blue "Donate" button, which you'll find in the upper-right corner of the home page. Then click on the Patrons

Fund option and once more on the "Donate" button, and you'll be taken to the contributions page where you can either log into your PayPal account or use a debit or credit card to make your donation. Your contribution will go straight to our Patrons Fund bank account and a receipt will be sent to you via e-mail.

You can also send your donation to our treasurer, Vivian Mortensen at:

506 Rose Avenue  
Des Plaines, IL 60016.

But do send your donation before April 1 so that we can include your name on the program for our awards luncheon on May 4.

Thank you so much for your support and I look forward to seeing you at our next meeting, which will be on Thursday, February 15. ■■

## FEBRUARY PROGRAM

### Sonali Dev

#### Novels with a Bollywood twist

by KAREN PULVER, CO-CHAIR

The romance continues on the day after Valentine's Day. Our February presenter, Sonali Dev, has given the world four novels with a Bollywood twist in addition to her many essays and articles. Hear her describe how, since the age of eight, she has been finding her voice as a woman of color, as a traveler, and as a writer of romance novels featuring Indian and Indian-American characters.



Sonali has academic degrees in architecture and writing. Raised in Mumbai and now a long-time resident of Naperville, she is well qualified to write about characters whose lives are divided between two cultures. In addition to winning a RITA, known as an Oscar award of the romance world, she has written reviews for NPR and was named best romance writer of 2014 by the American Library Association.

Add romance to your life at the FAW luncheon on Thursday, February 15. ■■



## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Luncheon Reservations

*Attention All: The February meeting of the Friends of American Writers will be held on Thursday, February 15, 2018.*

Luncheon reservations for the February 15, 2018 meeting of the Friends of the American writers are due no later than 6:00 p.m. on Sunday, February 11, 2018. Please note, 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). If you wish a permanent reservation, please mention it to Lorraine or Pat when you call. All Board members automatically have permanent reservations. Also, a reminder that no permanent reservations are held over from last year to this year.

Luncheon will be served at 12:00 noon in the main floor dining room of the Fortnightly Club of Chicago, 120 W. Bellevue Place. The cost is \$45 per person, payable by check (preferred) in the front lobby on the day of the meeting. For group reservations, we ask that only one person make the reservation to avoid confusion. Please note, if you make a reservation and 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.

### Literature Committee

BY TAMMIE BOB, *Chair*

The Literature Committee met, and after a long and spirited discussion, we narrowed our list to 13 books—a difficult process since we had so many fine entries from which to choose. We are on track to select our winners in March. We are fortunate to have 15 members who bring a wealth of expertise and valuable insights to the table. As a group we manage to listen to and learn from each other.

We consider all book ratings with consideration and respect.

### Young People's Literature Committee

ANGELA GALL, *Chair*

BBBRRRR...Baby, it's cold outside! I think we would all agree that these frigid winter days are perfect reading weather. The author of *Calvin and Hobbes*, Bill Watterson, said it best: "On gray days, when it's snowing or raining, I think you should be able to call up a judge and take an oath that you'll just read a good book all day, and he'd allow you to stay home."

With the 35 total books the Young People's Literature Committee received, our members have discovered the perfect place to snuggle up and read:

"My favorite place to read is by the fireplace or my sunny window."

~Colleen Kadlec

"My favorite place to read is the back room in my house where the sun pours in. Not only is this spot super comfortable but the lighting is great for my eyes!" ~Peggy Kuzmiski

"My favorite place to read is my bed, covers wrapped tight, deep in the middle of the night. When anxious thoughts invade my brain, a book is the only tool to ease my pain!"

~Angela Gall

This month, Tanya Klasser beat us all by discovering the best place to read is on a shaded patio while vacationing in Puerto Vallarta!

Amongst all this heavy reading, our committee has narrowed our list down to 19 contenders, five of which seem destined for the winners' circle. Despite the cold, the next two months will sure to be a heated battle for the best of the books!

### Membership

IDA HAGMAN, *Chair*

We are delighted that many of our members are bringing guests to our monthly meetings. We hope that you will continue to bring friends to our luncheons and encourage them to join FAW. A member-

ship form is available on our website. In addition, forms will be available at the luncheon sign-in table.

Here's a change of address for your yearbook

Dori Roskin  
65 East Monroe Street  
#4713  
Chicago, IL 60603.

If you are a new member whose address is not in the yearbook, or have had a change of address, please contact me so I can update our records and let members know about the changes.

### A Special Invitation for You

FAW newsletter designer and honorary member Norman Baugher is holding an exhibition of his latest works, *Bison & Other Species*, in the Leslie Wolfe Gallery of the Old Town Art Center, 1763 N. North Park Avenue, during the month of February. The opening reception is on Friday, February 9, 2018, from 5:30 to 8:00 p.m. You will not only have an opportunity to meet and speak with the artist, you can stroll the gallery and enjoy his extraordinary paintings. If you are unable to make the opening, the gallery is open Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and on Saturday from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Of this show Norman wrote:

*I first saw live herds of bison free, unfettered by zoo bars, and parading as lords of the land when I visited Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Though majestic, bison are not pretty. They lack the elegance of horses, the grandeur of elephants, the colorfulness of birds, the friskiness of cats, and the friendliness of dogs. But they appear powerful and stoic, and this appearance has made them symbolic of American strength. Picturing these iconic creatures in and of their environment sent me to my easel to create images that express the relationship between the two. Bison and other Species, began with bison, I have since moved on to use the same approach with other species.*

Please join Norman to be part of this very special event. 

# FEATURE ARTICLE

by SHIRLEY BAUGHER



## SUE GRAFTON

### FROM A TO Y ...BUT NOT Z

*The publishing world has lost one of its most popular and prolific writers. Readers worldwide have lost an old friend. Sue Grafton, known for her alphabetically titled series that began in 1982 with A is for Alibi died on December 28, 2017 at the age of 77. Here is a little of her story.*

#### How to Say Thank You?

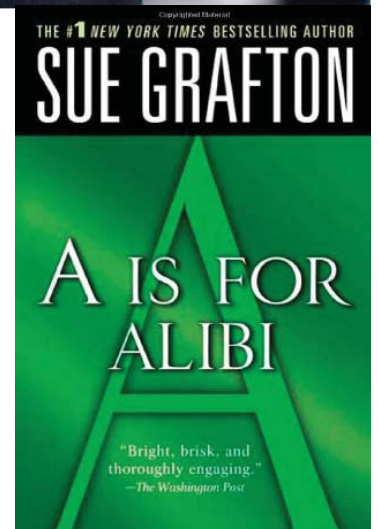
**T**HERE is a line in *The Last Hurrah* by Edwin O'Connor that goes, "How do you thank a man for a million laughs?" The speaker was referring to an old Irish American political boss, Frank Skeffington, who was running for reelection as mayor of an East Coast U. S. city for the last time. The city is assumed to be Boston. Skeffington's character is based on the life and career of Boston mayor and former Massachusetts governor James Michael Curley.

*The Last Hurrah* offers an insight into the kind of old style machine politics that Skeffington has mastered. It gives the reader an inside view into the world of big city politics as it follows Skeffington, the consummate old pro, through his last campaign. His opponent is a political newcomer: young, handsome, a brilliant war record, and no political experience. But Skeffington has to deal with a much more formidable foe than an attractive opponent. He must now face the challenge of an unknown enemy—

campaign advertising. Despite his years of experience and loyal followers, Skeffington falls victim to changing times. The newbie wins.

After the election, Frank Skeffington suffers a massive heart attack and dies, leaving behind a city that no longer has room for him or his political style. As a few of his cronies talk about the changes and the election at the old pol's wake one of them remarks, "The way it is, almost anybody could have beaten him." Another friend replied, "Almost anybody did."

There are a number of similarities that can be drawn between Grafton and Skeffington. Grafton's characters inhabit a fictional southern California town which was clearly based on Santa Barbara. Her star character, a female, is like Skeffington: a rugged individualist who knows the ropes and knows how to use the system to achieve her own ends most of the time. And the conclusions are usually predictable, whether they are the ones we wanted or not.



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## Finding Sue Grafton

**A**S MANY of you probably know, Sue Grafton was an American author of detective novels. She is best known for her “alphabet series” beginning with *A is for Alibi* published in 1982. *Alibi* introduced us to Grafton’s main protagonist, private investigator Kinsey Millhone who, through 25 books, challenges us with intricate plots, foils countless bad guys, and satisfies our need for justice. On December 28, 2017, P I Kinsey Millhone took off her badge and put it away forever.

## Biography

**S**UE GRAFTON was born in Louisville, Kentucky in 1939. Her father was a municipal bond lawyer who wrote mystery novels in his spare time. Her mother was a high school chemistry teacher. Hers was not a happy childhood. Her father enlisted in the army in World War II when she was only three years old. She was five when he came back. But he did not bring a “happily ever after” life with him. The parents quarreled constantly and both became alcoholics. From the age of five onward, she said she pretty much raised herself. She did manage to graduate from the University of Louisville with a degree in English Literature and afterwards went to work as a hospital administrator. But nothing came easy for young Sue Grafton. In 1960, her mother committed suicide. She relied on her father for guidance and affection—which he gave sparingly. Her father died in 1982, just a few months before *A is for Alibi* was published.

## Dealing with Loss

**D**ESPITE their difficult relationship Sue was indebted to her father in many ways. He loved detective fiction and wrote at night after office hours. He taught his daughter the finer points of writing and editing. He encouraged her efforts and groomed her to become a writer. She began writing seriously when she was eighteen. It took her four years to complete her first novel, but she persisted and pounded out seven more works of fiction in fairly short order. Only two of these, *Keziah Dane* and *The Lolly Madonna War* were published, and they were neither critical nor commercial successes.

Grafton decided she would be better off applying her writing talents in other directions. For the next fifteen years, she wrote screenplays for television movies: *Sex and the Single Parent*, *Mark I Love You*, and *Nurse*. She hit the jackpot with *Walking Through Fire*, which earned her a Christopher Award in 1979. She achieved even more success adapting two Agatha Christie novels for television: *A Caribbean Mystery* and *Sparkling Cyanide*. These were followed by *A Killer in the Family*, *Love on the Run*, and *Svengali*.

All of these projects, though not personally satisfying, made Sue Grafton a better writer and a better craftsman. Through them, she had learned how to structure a story,

write dialogue, and create compelling action sequences. More importantly, they gave her the confidence to return to her true love, writing fiction. Another element factored into this decision. Her personal life was a shambles. She was going through a bitter divorce and custody battle which had lasted for six long years. It got so bad that Grafton created fantasies about how she would kill her husband and end the ordeal. Her fantasies were so vivid, she decided to write them down. These fantasies morphed into her famous alphabet series.

## Creating the Alphabet Series

**W**HEN Sue Grafton decided to use the alphabet as a catalyst for her detective novels, she had a few authors who provided inspiration. One was John D. MacDonald whose Travis McGee series included a color in each title (*The Deep Blue Good-bye*, *Nightmare in Pink*, *Bright Orange for the Shroud*, *A Purple Place for Dying*). Another was Harry Kemelman’s Rabbi Small series, each of which had a day of the week in the title (*Friday the Rabbi Slept Late*, *Thursday the Rabbi Walked Out*, *Monday the Rabbi Took Off*.) But it was while reading Edward Gorey’s *The Gashlycrumb Tinies*, a rhyming picture book with an alphabetized list of ways in which 26 children met bizarre ends that she decided to write a series of novels whose titles would follow the alphabet. She said that she was smitten with the little Victorian children being dispatched in various ways: “A is for Amy who fell down the stairs; B is for Basil assaulted by bears; C is for Clara who wasted away; D is for Desmond thrown out of a sleigh.” She told a writer for the New York Times that she felt Edward Gorey was “deliciously bent.”

## Art Following Life

**T**HROUGHOUT her alphabet series writing career, Sue Grafton was asked if she felt a kinship with protagonist Kinsey Millhone—if Kinsey were, in fact, her alter ego. Well, yes—and no. Here is Grafton’s description of Kinsey in her book *N is for Noose*:

*So there I was, barreling down the highway in search of employment and not at all fussy about what work I’d take. I wanted distraction. I wanted some money, escape, anything to keep my mind off the subject of Robert Dietz. I’m not good at good-byes. I’ve suffered way too many in my day and I don’t like the sensation. On the other hand, I’m not that good at relationships. Get close to someone and the next thing you know, you’ve given them the power to wound, betray, irritate, abandon you, or bore you senseless. My general policy is to keep my distance, thus avoiding a lot of unruly emotion. In psychiatric circles, there are names for people like me.*

Do these words describe Sue Grafton? Think about it. She was married to Steve Humphrey for more than thirty-five years. She had three children, four grandchildren, and one great grandson. She loved cats, gardens, and

good food. She had homes in Montecito, California and Louisville where she lived and wrote peacefully and happily. So probably only in her imagination was she Kinsey Millhone. But what a splendid imagination that was.

### A Career Based on the Alphabet

**G**RAFTON'S alphabet series began with *A is for Alibi*. That was followed by *B is for Burglar*. Then came *C is for Corpse*, *D is for Deadbeat*, and so on. Each letter combined a letter with a word. After *G is for Gumshoe*, she was able to quit screenwriting and focus entirely on her novels. She released a new alphabet episode every year or so. She didn't always know very far in advance what would follow the letter. She did know that her last book in the series would be *Z is for Zero*, but she had no idea upfront what *V* (Vengeance), *W* (Wasted), *X* (no descriptor), and *Y* (Yesterday), would be. She just kind of played it by ear.

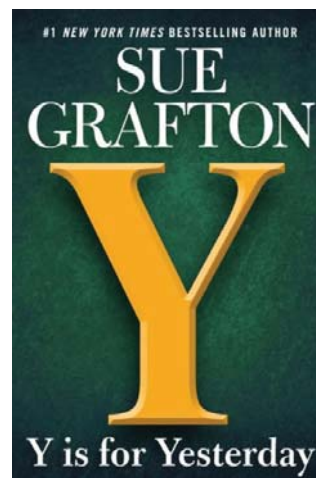
Throughout her writing career, Sue Grafton saw her novels published in 28 countries and in 26 languages. She was adamant about two things. After her career in Hollywood and the film business, she said she would never sell the film and television rights to her works. She told her children she would haunt them if they sold the film rights

after her death. She never did.

All of the books in her series were enormously successful. In all, they were on the New York Times Best Seller list for more than 400 weeks. *F is for Fugitive* was the first, entering at number 10 on the paperback best seller list in 1989. In 1995, *L is for Lawless* entered the list at number one, followed by ten more in the series.

### The End of it All

**S**UE GRAFTON died at Cottage Hospital in Santa Barbara on December 28, 2017. She had always said her alphabet series would end with *Z is for Zero*. Sadly, she died before writing it. Her daughter, following her mother's wishes, will not hire a ghost writer to finish the alphabet. "As far as we in the family are concerned," she said, "the alphabet now ends at Y." 📖



## The Reading Corner

What's New with Our Past Award Authors?

By VIVIAN MORTENSEN

*As most of you know, FAW gives annual awards to emerging authors who have published no more than three books. Here are some of these authors' works published since they received our recognition.*

### Dean Bakopoulus (2006 Winner)

*Summerlong* (Ecco, 2015) describes the sweltering heat one summer in a small Midwestern town during which a couple discover their marriage is not as solid as they thought. As the temperature climbs, both spouses grow more wild and reckless in humorous, biting situations.

### Sara Gruen (2007 Winner)

In 1945, a foolish trio of rich Americans arrive in Loch Ness to search for the famous monster in *At the Water's Edge* (Spiegel & Grau, 2015). While her brother and his friend try to find Nessie, Maddie is left on her own and begins to uncover truths about her family that force her to reevaluate her life.

### Jim Kokoris (2002 Winner)

*It's Nice. Outside* (St. Martin's Press, 2015) presents a father and son road trip from Chicago to Charleston. John, a 50-something underachiever is traveling with his disabled teenage son to attend his eldest daughter's wedding. Rather than a joyous family get-together, this event is hilariously doomed with major life decisions to make and a bitter ex-wife to confront.

### William Kent Krueger (1999 Winner)

Cork O'Connor, the character in Krueger's winning mystery, is back in *Vermilion Drift* (Simon & Schuster, 2015). When the body of a teenage

Ojibwe girl washes up on an island in Lake Superior, residents of the Bad Bluff reservation blame a mythical beast named Windigo. But private eye O'Connor thinks that rampant sex trafficking is the explanation.

### Robert Kurson (2005 Winner)

*Pirate Hunters: Treasure, Obsession and the Search for a Legendary Ship* (Random House, 2015) is the rollicking true story of two archaeologists looking for the elusive Golden Fleece, the 17th-century ship captained by Pirate Joseph Bannister, lost somewhere in the waters near the Dominican Republic. Besides the thrilling hunt are tales of pirates, lost ships and modern day research.

### Mary Morris (1986 Winner)

Morris' *The Jazz Palace* (Doubleday, 2015) is set in 1915 Chicago. The Lehrman family who run a hat factory, lost a son in a blizzard years earlier so they want Benny, one of the remaining children to carry on the family business. Benny however has

continued ▶



**SHIRLEY BAUGHER**  
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no interest in making hats. His true passion is piano, especially jazz, and he spends his nights in local clubs.

**Toni Morrison (1978 Winner)**

Nobel prize winner Morrison newest work is *God Help the Child* (Knopf, 2015). Sweetness, a black woman who likes passing as white, gives birth to the midnight black Lula Ann. Ashamed, she raises her at a bitter distance, rationalizing that this will toughen her up. But without love, Lula Ann has no moral compass and causes pain to those around her.

**Bich Minh Nguyen (2010 Winner)**

In *Pioneer Girl*, (Viking, 2014) PhD graduate Lee Lien discovers a family heirloom that her mother may have received from Laura Ingalls Wilder. Intrigued she begins to explore any connection between her ancestors and the famous pioneer author.

**Sara Paretsky (1985 Winner)**

The seventeenth entry in the V. I.

Warsawski series, *Brush Back* (Putnam, 2015) finds V. I. Warsawski reluctantly helping a former boyfriend who discovers his mother was framed for murder. To find the real killer, Warsawski is forced to confront ugly politics and violent elements in her Chicago neighborhood.

**Mona Simpson (1988 Winner)**

In *Casebook*, (Random House, 2014) Miles has always sensed the vulnerability of his mother, a recently divorced mathematician, and throughout his childhood and adolescence feels the need to look out for her. When Irene falls in love with Eli, Miles is highly suspicious. He enlists his best friend to help him look deep into Eli's background, going so far as to work with a private investigator.

**Jane Smiley (1982 Winner)**

*Golden Age* (Random House, 2015) is the third book in the Last

Hundred Years Trilogy (Some Luck was published in 2014 and Early Warning came out in 2015). This book opens in 1987. The next generation of the Langdon family is facing economic, social, cultural, and political challenges unlike anything their ancestors had encountered before. Richie and Michael, the rivalrous twin sons of Frank, the golden son and World War II hero, have grown into men, and the wild antics of their youth slide seamlessly into a wilder adulthood in finance on Wall Street and in government in Washington, D.C.

**Larry Watson (1994 Winner)**

*Let Him Go* (Milkweed, 2013) Years after their only son was killed in an accident, his parents travel miles to reclaim their grandson whose mother has remarried and cut all contact to them. However, their mission proves complicated as Lorna, the daughter-in-law, has become a virtual hostage in the home of her new in-laws. ■■