



FEBRUARY NEWSLETTER
2019-2020 NUMBER 6

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FRIENDS OF AMERICAN WRITERS CHICAGO

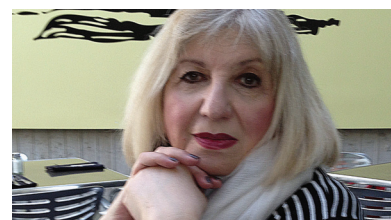
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President's Message

CHRISTINE SPATARA, *President*

Welcome to February. Sometime this month, you will receive a letter from me asking for contributions to our Patron's Fund. The Patron's Fund is a very important component

of the Friends of American Writers. It is the fund allows us to award talented Midwest authors prize money at our May meeting. We encourage you to be generous so we can continue our mission of encouraging writers to go forward in their careers. Thank you all for your support of FAW. 📖



FEBRUARY PROGRAM

By ROBERTA GATES

Meet the Vanishing Woman

Doug Peterson and Jennifer Goran



Jennifer Goran as Ellen Craft

To celebrate Black History Month, February's program focuses on an incredible escape from slavery. We are happy to welcome author Doug Peterson and actress Jennifer Goran who will be presenting a fascinating program entitled "The Vanishing Woman." Peterson, author of the book by the same name, has lifted an almost unbelievable story from history about a woman named Ellen Craft who was able to escape slavery in 1848 by posing as a white man. This was possible because, even though her mother was a slave, her father was her master, and her skin was as white as his. William, who was Ellen's husband, was able to escape as well by posing as her personal slave.

Ellen and William knew they could never have children until they were free, a fact which prompted them to embark on their 800-mile journey from Georgia to Philadelphia. Their incredible story riveted a nation and put the Fugitive Slave Act to the test, alerting even the White House to their plight. The ultimate irony: This "invisible" woman became one of the most visible symbols of freedom in



Doug Peterson

nineteenth-century America.

Doug Peterson is a prolific writer who has authored 70 books, including four historical novels: *The Vanishing Woman*, *The Disappearing Man* and *The Lincoln League*, all about African-Americans in the antebellum South, and *The Puzzle People*, a murder/suspense novel based on events surrounding the rise and fall of the

Berlin Wall.

In addition, Peterson has written many books for children, including 42 books in the popular VeggieTales series, as well as *The Slobfather*, which won the 2004 Gold Medallion Award for preschool books.

Peterson also became a playwright in 2019 when he wrote *Friends Indeed* about the improbable friendship between Benjamin Franklin and the evangelist George Whitefield. And finally, his short story "The Career of Horville Sash" was made into a music video featuring the Grammy-winner Jennifer Warnes.

You won't want to miss seeing this versatile writer and the actress who will help him bring to life the incredible but little-known story of *The Vanishing Woman!* 📖



ANNOUNCEMENTS

LUNCHEON RESERVATIONS

Fortnightly of Chicago
120 E. Bellevue Place

The February 2020 meeting of the Friends of American Writers will be held on Wednesday, February 12, 2020. Luncheon reservations for this meeting are due no later than 6:00 p.m. on Sunday, February 9, 2020. Please note, this deadline is firm. No reservations will be accepted following this date and time. To reserve, contact Peggy Kuzminski (1-773-775-4540) or Pat Adelberg (1-847-588-0911)

If you wish a permanent reservation, please mention it when you call. All Board members automatically have permanent reservations. Also, a reminder that no permanent reservations are held over from year to year.

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 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 Awards Committee

By IDA HAGMAN, *Literature Awards Committee Co-Chair*

The January meeting was very enjoyable. The talk on pigs was fun and illuminating and received good reviews from attendees.

Members of the Adult Literature Award Committee are busy reading. We received 72 entries this year. After all the books are read by at least two people and judged by their style, characters, themes and plots; we will pare the list down to approximately 8 books. Everyone on the committee will read all of these. We will then choose one or two winners. So far several fine entries have emerged.


Young People's Literature Committee

By ANGELA GALL, *Awards Chair*

As the cold air hit our faces, making us wonder why we live in an area that hurts our faces, the Young People's Literature Committee members bustled into the warmth of the Riverside Library on Wednesday, January 15th.

While we waited for the chill to exit our bones, we recalled certain characters from literature who froze us with their hateful ways. For example, Deb remembered Cathy Ames in *East of Eden* who had no empathy or anything approaching human feeling. Joan cited Angle Clare from *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and Chillingworth from *The Scarlet Letter* as characters of evil. Gail hoped to never meet the author Lisa Jewell of *Then She Was Gone* for her all-too-real portrayal of Tutor, a character responsible for the death of a seventeen year old. Peggy recollected how much the mother-in-

law in *Big Little Lies* actually scared her. Tanya reflected on how Jack's demented demeanor in *The Shinning* terrified her. Vicki shuttered when she thought back to the two killers, Dick Hickcock and Perry Smith, in the first book she read of the true crime genre, *In Cold Blood*. Angela discussed how she was compelled to read *Columbine* about the pair of school shooters, Dylan and Eric. She was a student teacher at the time in which their horrific acts took place. The book contends that bullying did not contribute to their actions, instead a psychopathic mind did. Roberta mentioned "Amon Goeth," the camp commandant in *Schindler's List*. He randomly shot people from the balcony of his house and tortured his maid with his destructive and crazy half-love of her. Yet he could eat, drink and be jolly without compunction." Vivian said, "I hate cruelty. David Copperfield's stepfather sends him away when David is very young and he is terrified to leave his mother. The stepfather is a true villain." Sally looked to *Nickel and Dimed* not for a specific character but the system of inequality to low-wage workers that engenders anger in her. Colleen summoned to mind the epitome of childhood evil: Snow White's stepmother!

All thawed out, the Young People's Literature Committee conducted a heated debate, slashing books from their list until only twelve remained to further evaluate at their next meeting on February 19th. 

JOIN US IN MARCH FOR READERS & REVIEWERS

By ROBERTA GATES

Please join us when Readers & Reviewers meets on March 11 for a discussion of *The Distance Home* by Paula Saunders. This moving novel, which was shortlisted last year for one of our prizes, features two siblings whose love for each other is undermined by the competitive dynamics of their family.

Saunders reached back to her own childhood to produce this accessible but beautifully written novel which raises psychological issues common to almost every family.

Our discussion of the book will take place in the boardroom as soon as the board meeting is adjourned, which should be about eleven o'clock. Any member (or guest of a member) is welcome to attend.

I look forward to seeing you on March 11! 

VALENTINE'S DAY MUSINGS

FEATURE ARTICLE

by SHIRLEY BAUGHER

Most of us associate Valentine's Day with hearts, flowers, chocolates, and pretty cards. But how many actually know how this day, celebrated annually on February 14 and is not a national holiday in any country, came to be or for whom it is named?

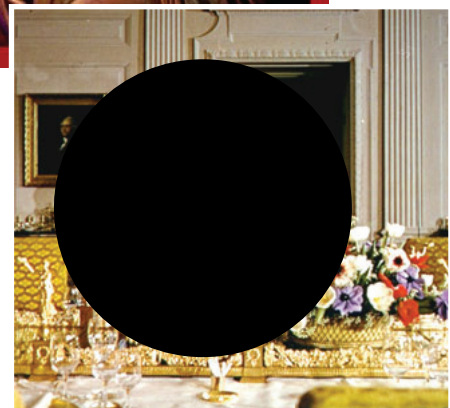
A Little History

The history of Valentine's Day and its patron saint is something of a mystery. The Catholic Church recognizes three different saints named Valentine. Interestingly, all of these saints were martyred. One story goes that Valentinus was a priest who served during the third century in Rome. The Emperor Claudius II had decided that single men made better soldiers than men who had wives and children, so he outlawed marriage for young men. Valentine thought this was an unjust decree, so he secretly performed marriage ceremonies for young couples. When Claudius found out what the priest was doing, he ordered that Valentinus be put to death.

Another story says that Valentine was a priest who was killed for helping Christians escape from Roman prisons where they were being beaten and tortured. Yet another tells of a man named Valentine who actually sent a "Valentine" greeting to a young girl who visited him in prison while he was awaiting execution. He signed the letter, "from your Valentine."

None of these stories can be verified, but all point to the three Valentines as heroic and romantic figures because of their bravery and their martyrdom. Their fame grew, and by the Middle Ages, St. Valentine had become one of the most popular saints in England and France.

Which brings us to the date. Why February 14? While scholars do not think any of the Valentines was actually born on that date, there is some evidence that at least one of them died in the middle of February 270 A.D. One story suggests that the Roman church selected the date in order to Christianize the popular pagan holiday Lupercalia—a festival dedicated to Faunus, the Roman god of agriculture and to the founders of Rome, Romulus and Remus. At this festival, the Luperci, an order of Roman priests, gathered to sacrifice a goat at the cave where Romulus and Remus were raised by the she-wolf Lupa. Followers cut the goat's hide into strips and slapped young women with them. The women did not mind the slaps because they believed the goat's hide made them more fertile. Later in the day, the young women placed their names in a big urn. Single men chose a name and became paired with the woman whose name they had selected.



Clockwise from top left:

Pope Geladius

An early Valentine

Jackie Kennedy conducting her Valentine's Day tour of the White House in 1962

Lupercalia continued to be a popular holiday until it was deemed "un Christian" by Pope Geladius, who was the supreme pontiff of the Catholic Church from 1 March AD 492 until 19 November 496. Geladius renamed the day St. Valentine's Day. As years went by, the day somehow

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became associated with love, a notion reinforced by the idea that February 14 was the beginning of the mating season of birds.

Written Valentines began to appear after 1400. The oldest known valentine was a poem written in 1415 by the Duke of Orleans to his wife while he was imprisoned in the Tower of London. This poem is now part of the manuscript collection in the London British Library. Several years later, King Henry V reinforced the practice of sending written love notes on February 14 by hiring John Lydgate to compose a valentine note to Catherine of Valois. The practice of sending valentines to a loved one has increased in popularity. It was inevitable that some money-making entrepreneur would see this as a profitable enterprise. In the United States in 1840, a woman named Esther Howland began selling mass-produced valentine cards made with lace, ribbons, and colorful pictures. By 1900, the fancy printed cards had replaced handwritten notes.

Today, Valentine's Day, still not a national holiday anywhere, is widely celebrated in the United States, Canada, Great Britain, France, and Australia. An estimated one billion Valentine's Day cards are sent each year—making Valentine's Day the second largest card-sending holiday of the year. Christmas is first with 2.6 billion cards sent. Women

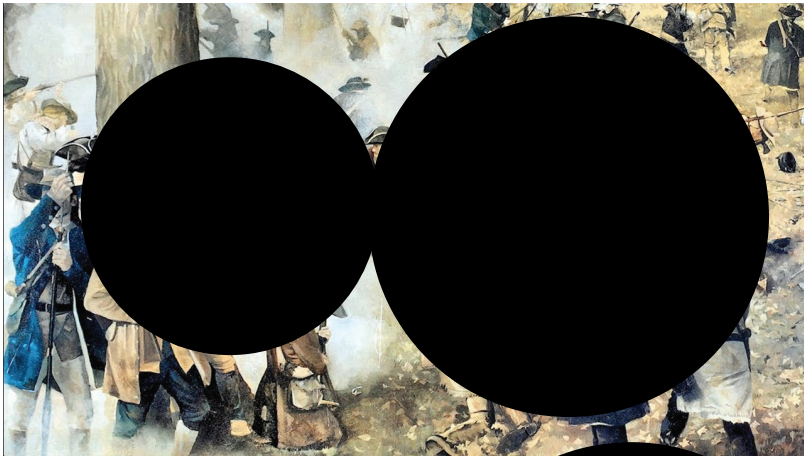
purchase about 85 percent of all valentines sold.

Some Fun Valentine's Day Facts

Although Valentine's Day will probably continue to be associated with hearts and flowers, here are a few non-romantic things you probably didn't know happened on Valentine's Day:

- 1779, The Battle of Kettle Creek occurred in Georgia during the American Revolution. Four hundred patriots launched an attack on 800 Loyalists. The patriot militia scored a decisive victory.
- William Tecumseh Sherman, hero of the Civil War and best remembered for his march from Atlanta to the Sea, died on February 14, 1891, at his home on New York's upper West Side.
- On this day in 1876, Alexander Graham Bell received a telephone patent, beating out a rival by just a few hours.
- On Valentine's Day 1912, Arizona became a state—more than fifty years after Oregon joined the Union.
- Labor leader Jimmy Hoffa was born on February 14, 1913.
- On February 14, 1945, in the final months of World War II, British and American forces launched a deadly attack on Dresden, the historic capital of the German state of Saxony.
- Israel's first parliament, the Knesset, met on February 14, 1949, presided over by its first president, Chaim Weizmann.
- American First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy conducted a memorable tour of the White House on February 14, 1962.

So, having armed you with a little history, I wish you all a Happy Valentine's Day. 🇺🇸

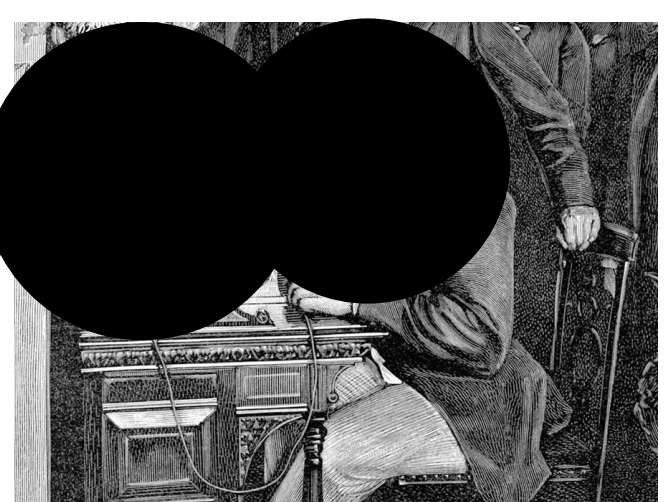
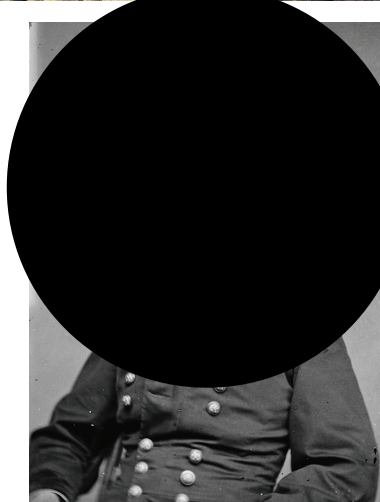


Counter clockwise from Above:

The Battle of Kettle Creek

William Tecumseh Sherman

Alexander Graham Bell



The Reading Corner

The Guardians
by John Grisham

Shirley Baugher

About John Grisham

There is a reason John Grisham is one of our most popular contemporary authors, and one whose works are always on the Best Seller lists. He gives us characters who, though likeable or detestable, are always memorable. His plots are engrossing, and sense of timing impeccable. It is almost impossible to stop reading until the bad guys have been brought to justice and the protagonist has put a period on the last problem to be solved. But, fair warning, it is impossible to read just one Grisham novel. Once you have finished one, you will want to read another, and another, and another; until, like me, you have read them ALL!

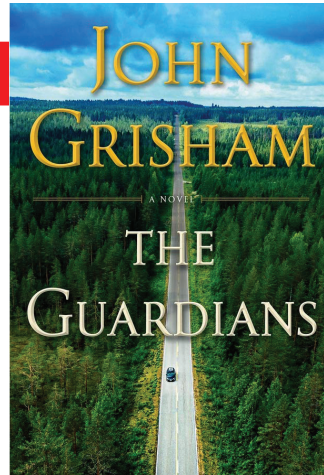
John Grisham did not set out to be a writer. As a child, he dreamed of being a professional baseball player. He soon realized he did not have the right stuff for that calling, and turned to the law. He graduated from law school at Ole Miss in 1981, and established himself as an outstanding criminal defense and personal injury attorney. In 1983, he was elected to the Mississippi State House of Representatives, where he served until 1990. His career took a dramatic detour after he sat through the trial of a twelve-year old rape victim. The details of the case haunted him, and he began to wonder what would have happened if the girl's father had killed the rapist. He put his thoughts on paper, and before he knew it, he was writing a novel about his fantasy. He would get up every morning at 5:00 a.m. and spend several hours writing before he went off to his "day job." Three years later, in 1987, his version of the trial was published as *A Time to Kill*. (I know

many of you are now experiencing an "aha" moment.)

At first, no publishers were interested in the book, but eventually it was optioned by Wynwood Press. They printed only 5,000 copies and brought it out in 1988.

Grisham did not spend time waiting around for big sales. The day after he completed *A Time to Kill*, he started his next book—the story of a hotshot young attorney who joined a law firm that was not what it appeared to be. That book was titled *The Firm*, and had a much better reception than its predecessor. With *The Firm*, Grisham hit the jackpot. He sold the film rights to *The Firm* to Paramount Pictures for \$600,000, and publishers were falling all over themselves get the book rights. Doubleday won out. *The Firm* spent 47 weeks on the New York Times best seller (NYT) list and became the best selling novel of 1991. The movie, which starred Tom Cruise and Gene Hackman, filled the theaters.

Grisham started turning out a book a year. After *The Firm*, he wrote *The Pelican Brief* and *The Client*, both of which hit number one on the NYT best seller list. His reputation as the master of the legal thriller was established. The success of these books brought about a reprinting of *The Firm* by Doubleday in both hard cover and paperback. This time around, it was a best seller. Other Grisham books include: *The Chamber*, *The Rainmaker*, *Street Lawyer*, *The Testament*, *The Brethren*, *The Painted House*, *Skipping Christmas*, *The Summons*, *The King of Torts*, *The Last Broker*, *Playing for Pizza*, *The Appeal*, *The Associates*, *The Confession*, *The Litigators*, *Calico Joe*, *The Racketeer*, *Sycamore Row*, and *Gray Mountain*. All were international best sellers. Nine of his novels have been made into movies.



In 1996, Grisham took a little time off from his writing to go back into the courtroom. He represented the family of a railroad brakeman who had been killed when he was pinned between two cars. He won the case and the jury awarded the family nearly \$700,000—the biggest verdict of his career.

While John Grisham continues to write, he also devotes himself to charitable causes. He helped raise nearly nine million dollars to help the victims of Hurricane Katrina. He also pursues his early passion for baseball. The little boy who dreamed of becoming a professional baseball player now serves as the local Little League Commissioner. He has built six ball fields on his property in Oxford, Mississippi and has hosted 350 kids on 26 Little League teams.

The Guardians

John Grisham's latest book, *The Guardians*, published in 2019, is based on a true story. A New York Times best seller, it tells of a young black man, Quincy Miller, in the town of Seabrook, Florida; wrongfully convicted of killing a local lawyer, Keith Russo. Quincy has spent 22 years in prison maintaining his innocence. But no one believes him; and he has no money for an attorney, no friends, no family, and no advocate in the outside world. In desperation, he turns to a group called The Guardians, a small nonprofit organization run by Cullen Post who is also an Episcopalian minister.

Cullen travels the country fighting wrongful convictions and taking on clients who have been forgotten by the system. He meets with Quincy at the prison in Seabrook, Florida and is convinced of his innocence. He decides to use The Guardians' meager resources to have Quincy exonerated. To do so, he must unravel the State's case, and this is not going to be easy. Unknown to him, there are powerful people who do

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SHIRLEY BAUGHER
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not want Quincy Miller freed and who do not want anyone looking into the death of Keith Russo. They would have no qualms about killing anyone who got too close to the truth.

Cullen Post, or Post as he refers to himself, is relentless in his pursuit, not to find the real killer, but to exonerate Quincy. When he finally has enough evidence to rip the prosecution's case apart, he manages to secure a new trial for Quincy. Still, the going is not easy. He has to get prior witnesses to refute their original testimonies. This is particularly tricky since the witnesses are afraid they might be convicted of perjury. He has to find proof that the original testimonies were overreaching, speculative, and not based on science. And he has to have the state's most critical piece of evidence, a blood-spattered flashlight disallowed. This is worse than challenging because, even though witnesses testified, and the prosecution insisted, that it was undoubtedly the murder weapon, it was never found. Even worse, he has to defeat the state's new prosecutor, who is both competent and determined.

How can he do all these things? You'll have to read the book to find out—but I guarantee you will be glad you did. Grisham is a good writer, and this is a compelling story—well worth your time. ■■

FAW MEETINGS 2019-20

A reminder of the FAW meetings for 2019-20. Be sure to mark your calendars. You won't want to miss a single one!

September 11, 2019

Rosellen Brown
Award-winning author of
Before and After

October 9, 2019

"Confessions of a Literary Translator: The Prose and the Cons"
Ann Fisher

November 13, 2019

"Flappers, Cocktails, and Temperance: True Stories of Prohibition"
Susanna Caulkins, author of
The Speakeasy Murders

December 11, 2019

Jenny Riddle brings to life
"The Bouvier Sisters"

January 8, 2020

"All About Pork"
Cynthia Clampett

February 12, 2020

"Meet the Vanishing Woman"
Doug Peterson and Ellen Craft

March 11, 2020

"Growing up Jewish and Surviving in Nazi Germany"
Eric Blaustein, Holocaust Survivor

April 1, 2020

Jane Hamilton
Award-winning author of
The Book of Ruth.

May 1, 2020:

Literature Awards Program