



**MARCH NEWSLETTER
2019-2020 NUMBER 7**

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FRIENDS OF AMERICAN WRITERS CHICAGO


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President's Message

CHRISTINE SPATARA, *President*

I was sorry to miss our luncheon last month but I was assured that the program was outstanding. March's program will undoubtedly be a great success. Our speaker is Mr. Eric Blaustein who happens to be a Holocaust survivor. In this time of political turmoil both in our country and around the world, it is important



for all of us to look back in history and be reminded of the horrors that can occur when we become complacent of the social issues. It is vital that we remain vigilant and acknowledge the extremism that is pervasive around us. We should never forget Nazi Germany as an example of how an enlightened society can fall into an abyss of destruction. It is an honor for us to have Mr. Blaustein to relate his story and share his memories. 

MARCH PROGRAM

Eric Blaustein

By TAMMIE BOB

Growing up Jewish in Nazi Germany

Holocaust Survivor Eric Blaustein

Holocaust survivor Eric Blaustein was 12 when German officials arrested his father, along with thousands of other Jews, during Kristallnacht, Nov. 9, 1938. By that time he had been living in Nazi

Germany for six years, but his father's arrest was a watershed moment, brutally clarifying that he and his family, were no longer welcome as German citizens.

Blaustein avoided the Nazis until late in 1944, just months before the end of the war. But at 17 he was sent to Buchenwald, where he survived until American forces arrived.

The 93-year-old, currently living in Lombard, Ill, didn't want to speak on the Holocaust for a long time. "It's frankly impossible to describe in a realistic way," he says.


He started giving speeches when he was around 70, in high schools, colleges and



elsewhere, and found meaning in describing to new generations what can happen when a society chooses to place itself under totalitarian rule. Currently he is one of less than a

handful of survivors still speaking under the auspices of the Illinois Holocaust Museum in Skokie. (Disclaimer: He is also my father.)

He describes how he, a Jewish youth, survived the entire war in Germany, which very few Jews were able to do. Throughout his presentation, he explains how changes in the laws of the time personally impacted him and his family. Despite the topic, this is a lively, fascinating presentation. To attend, be sure to reserve places for you and your friends before 6:00 PM March 8th.

Contact Pat Adelburg (847) 588-0911 or Peggy Kuzminsky (773) 775-4540 



ANNOUNCEMENTS

LUNCHEON RESERVATIONS

Fortnightly of Chicago
120 E. Bellevue Place

Luncheon reservations and cancellations are due no later than 6:00 p.m. Sunday March 1. To reserve, please call Pat Adelberg (1-847-588-0911) or Peggy Kuzminski (1-775-4540). Permanent reservations are preferred and can be requested when making a reservation. Regular reservations can be made month by month.

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) to FAW in the front lobby on the day of the meeting. Cash is also accepted. For group reservations, we ask that only one person make the reservation 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. Discounted parking is available at 100 Bellevue Place, two doors west of the Fortnightly.

Seating Arrangements: Please mention any special seating arrangements when you make your reservation, e.g., with guests, with a friend or group, or disability seating. Every effort will be made to honor your request. If you have trouble climbing stairs, please call the Fortnightly in advance (312-944-1330.)

LITERATURE AWARDS COMMITTEE

KAREN PULVER
Committee Co-Chair

The Best Kind of Homework

One of our committee members says her granddaughter teases her about having “homework”, referring to her reading submissions for this year’s

awards. Seventy-two titles have been submitted this year, filling more than three shelves in my bookcase. Some come from publishers and some directly from emerging authors along with personal commentary about their writing journeys. We carry the books to meetings in shopping bags and suitcases, then distribute them among readers eager to find the next winners. Using some specific criteria regarding language, characters, plot and themes to rate the books, our group retains and eliminates submissions at each meeting. But it’s more than that. It’s the cover, the tone, the identification with the Midwest, and the emotional contact with the reader that are most difficult to quantify. Our ratings can vary greatly, and our opinions can be swayed through discussion.

I have gained a lot of respect for our authors, but also for my co-readers and their insights. It’s a privilege to hear their intelligent and witty comments and to have lunch in the elegant Women’s Athletic Club. When we make our final selections, we come to consensus and choose writers who provide us with reading that is, in fact, not “homework” but an enjoyable and thoughtful experience.

Watch for the April newsletter to see the prize-winning titles, and please be at the May lunch to meet their authors.


YOUNG PEOPLE’S LITERATURE AWARDS COMMITTEE

ANGELA GALL
Committee 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.

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 Shining* terrified her. Vicki shuddered 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. 

To Discuss *The Distance Home*
by Paula Saunders

By ROBERTA GATES

Please join us on Wednesday, March 11 at 11 o'clock in the Fortnightly boardroom when Readers & Reviewers meets to discuss Paula Saunders's beautifully written debut novel entitled *The Distance Home*.

This novel, which is based on Saunders's own childhood in South Dakota, opens in the 1960s just as Eve and Al are adjusting to married life in the basement apartment of Al's parents. After Leon and his sister, René, are born, the family moves, but life doesn't get much better as they wander from one isolated prairie town to another. Eva, feeling abandoned and resentful, holds down the fort, while Al, a cattle broker, spends most of his time on the road.

Each parent has a favorite child. Al dotes on René, a precocious and competitive girl who succeeds at everything she tries, while Eve favors Leon, a gentle soul who stutters and is somewhat awkward. He also has "olive skin and from some- where buried deep in the silence of the genetic line, the beautiful



Paula Saunders

high cheekbones and broad nose of the Sioux." As if this weren't enough to set him apart, Eve, in an attempt to cure his clumsiness, enrolls him in a ballet class. To her surprise and his, Leon excels at dance. This makes Al very uncomfortable, but when René starts dancing too, he is thrilled with his little ballerina.

As the only boy in his dance class, Leon endures brutal teasing, and it's no better at home where his father's withering disapproval is a constant. In one heartrending scene, dinner guests watch as Leon proudly shows off the tricks he's taught his dog, Chuck. Eva laughs and applauds, and even Al seems pleased, but then Leon accidentally knocks his plate onto the floor. "Chicken, bones, peas, bits of potato, and cranberry fly into the air, then fall and spill over the carpet" as Al, "his face on fire," chastises Leon, calling him a "damn dumb Indian." Leon is then sent outside to the patio, where he sits "on the ledge, his legs hanging down to nowhere, his arm around Chuck," while René takes over, entertaining the company with a one-handed cartwheel, a headstand, the splits, and other gymnastic feats.

From this point on, the die is cast, with each of the two siblings following a path that increasingly isolates one

from the other. It's a familiar story, but because Saunders gives each of her characters a voice, the family portrait she presents is not only vivid but sympathetic. Her larger and more universal concern, however, is what happens to "winners" and "losers" in a culture like ours where striving and power dominate.

This book had a huge impact on me, and I hope that it will on you, too. But even if you don't like it as much as I do—or even if you don't have time to read it all—I hope you'll join us on March 11. Everyone is welcome, including listeners!

Please join us when Readers and 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! 

BEWARE THE IDES OF MARCH

FEATURE ARTICLE

by SHIRLEY BAUGHER

The Ides of March is a day on the Roman calendar that corresponds to March 15. It was marked by several religious observances and was notable for the Romans as a deadline for settling debts. In 44 BC, it became notorious as the date of the assassination of Julius Caesar. The death of Caesar made the Ides of March a turning point in Roman history. It was one of the events that marked the transition from the historical



Reverse side of a coin issued by Caesar's assassin, Brutus, in the autumn of 42 BC, with the abbreviation EID MAR (Eidibus Martiis – on the Ides of March) under a cap of freedom between two daggers

period known as the Roman Republic to the Roman Empire.

The holidays observed by the Romans from the first of March through the Ides were often regarded as new year celebrations. So why is the new year celebrated in March? Simple explanation. Although March (Martius) was the third month of the Julian calendar, in the oldest Roman calendar it was the first month of the year.

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The Death of Caesar (1798) by Vincenzo Camuccini

It is interesting to note that the Romans did not number days of a month sequentially from the first through the last day as we do. Instead, they counted back from three fixed points of the month: the Nones (5th or 7th, depending on the length of the month), the Ides (13th or 15th), and the Kalends (1st of the following month). The Ides occurred near the midpoint, on the 13th for most months, but on the 15th for March, May, July, and October. The Ides were supposed to be determined by the full moon, recalling the lunar origin of the Roman calendar. On the earliest calendar, the Ides of March would have been the first full moon of the new year.

The Ides were celebrated by the Romans in a number of ways. They were sacred to Jupiter, the Romans' supreme deity. In keeping with the occasion, there was always a special sacrifice. The Flamen Dialis, Jupiter's high priest, led the "Ides sheep" in procession along the Via Sacra to the citadel located on the northern spur of the Capitoline Hill, where it was sacrificed.

In addition to the monthly sacrifice of the sheep, the Ides of March was also the occasion of the Feast of Anna Perenna, a goddess of the year whose festival originally concluded the ceremonies of the new year. The day was enthusiastically celebrated among the common people with picnics, drinking, and revelry—much like our current New Year's Day — or New Year's Eve for some. On a more grisly note, one source from antiquity also places the Mamuralia on the Ides of March. This observance, which has aspects of the scapegoat or ancient Greek pharmakos ritual, involved beating an old man dressed in animal skins and perhaps driving him from the city. The ritual may have been a new year festival representing the expulsion of the old year. Today, we are more humane. We just show Father Time escorting out the old year and welcoming in

a new-born baby.

In the later Imperial period, the Ides marked the beginning of a "holy week" of festivals celebrating Cybele and Attis. The opening day was called *Canna intrat* ("The Reed enters"). It signifies the time when Attis was born and found among the reeds of a Phrygian river. He was discovered by shepherds or the goddess Cybele, who was also known as the *Magna Mater* ("Great Mother"). A week later, on 22 March, the solemn commemoration of

Arbor intrat ("The Tree enters") marked the death of Attis under a pine tree. A college of priests, the *dendrophoroi* ("tree bearers") annually cut down a tree, hung from it an image of Attis, and carried it to the temple of the *Magna Mater* with lamentations. The day was formalized as part of the official Roman calendar under Claudius (d. 54 AD.) A three-day period of mourning followed, culminating with celebrating the rebirth of Attis on 25 March, the date of the vernal equinox on the Julian calendar.

Assassination of Julius Caesar

In modern times, the Ides of March is best known as the date on which Julius Caesar was assassinated. In 44 BC, Caesar was stabbed to death at a meeting of the Senate. As many as 60 conspirators, led by Brutus and Cassius, were involved. According to Plutarch, a seer had warned Caesar that harm would come to him no later than the Ides of March. On his way to the Theatre of Pompey, where he would be assassinated, Caesar passed the seer and jokingly remarked "The Ides of March are come", implying that the prophecy had not been fulfilled; to which the seer replied "Aye, Caesar, but not gone." This meeting is famously depicted in William Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar*, when Caesar is warned by the soothsayer (later identified as a *haruspex*—a religious official who interpreted omens by inspecting the entrails of sacrificial animals—named *Spurinna*) to "Beware the Ides of March."

Caesar's death was a closing event in the crisis of the Roman Republic. It triggered the civil war that would result in the rise to power of his adopted heir Octavian, who would later avenge Caesar's death. Octavian characterized the slaughter as a religious sacrifice, since it occurred on the Ides of March at the new altar dedicated to the deified Julius.

Other Special Days in March

So there you have it—the principal reason for fearing the Ides of March. While I doubt that many of us today would succumb to that superstition, the admonition has persisted through the ages.

That is not to say that contemporaries have ignored the importance of March days, the Ides included. Here are a few that might be of interest, although you may not have heard of some of them.

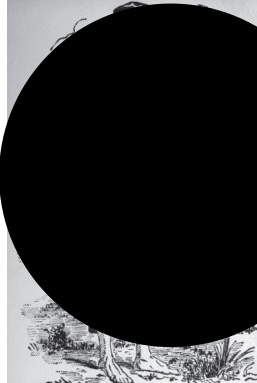
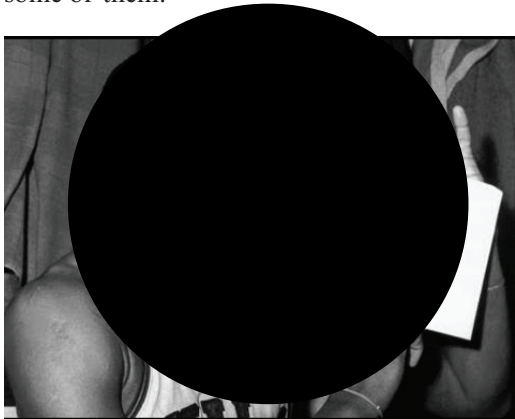
March 24, 2008, Bhutan became a democracy

March 26, 1874, Robert Frost was born

March 29, 1892, Coca Cola was invented

March 30, 1864, Alaska was purchased by the USA

There are, of course, many other special March days—March Madness, the Academy Awards...but you might have fun compiling your own list. 🇺🇸



March 1, 1872, Yellowstone National Park was established

March 2, 1962, Wilt Chamberlain scored 100 points in an NBA game

March 3, National Anthem Day

March 5, 1770, the Boston Massacre occurred

March 7, 1973, the first Iditarod kicked off

March 8, Daylight Savings Time begins

March 10, 1862, paper money was first issued

March 11, Johnny Appleseed Day

March 12, 1945, Anne Frank died

March 13, 1781, Uranus was discovered

March 14, Pi Day

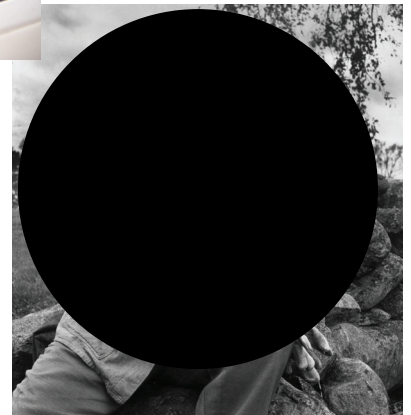
March 17, St. Patrick's Day

March 18, The first space walk occurred

March 20, the first day of Spring

March 21, Children's Poetry Day

March 23, National Toast Day (really)



The Reading Corner

By KAREN PULVER

Hildebrand, John

*Long Way Round:
Through the Heartland by River*

Those of us who enjoy traveling know that the more slowly you move, the more you will understand your surroundings. This theory is born out in *Long Way Round*. The author plans a trip around his native state of Wisconsin mapping out a route he can travel by canoe. This is not an extreme physical exercise challenge; he uses a small motor on his canoe and has friends meet him at crucial points to drive rather than to portage long distances. He is in no hurry and actually goes home to Eau Claire on occasion to refresh. Hildebrand camps in a

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SHIRLEY BAUGHER
1710 N. Crilly Court
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tent, but also stays at friends' homes or in hotels.

His aim is to see his wider neighborhood up close, to meet the locals, to understand the economy and sociology of the region. He endeavors to show the connectedness of community through the idea of a mythical river that travels in a circle.

Hildebrand does not hesitate to express his political opinions, feeling that Wisconsin is now deeply divided and not knowing how to communicate with those whose ideas are so different from his. When visiting small towns he explores the concept of staying, leaving, and returning to them and the mindset of those who stay, leave or return. He applies his ideas to his university students' experiences and adaptations to the larger world.

Like the flow of a river, the narrative flows easily from place to place and topic to topic. John Hildebrand has written several other works of non-fiction, focusing on nature and exploration. I look forward to exploring them. 📖

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