

FRIENDS OF AMERICAN WRITERS



Our mission shall be to encourage new, talented writers associated with the Midwest and to promote the arts, especially literature, among our members.

Aug 1, 2020 - Fawchicago.org

Message from FAW President

The FAW Board and Program Committee is hard at work planning for the coming year, and like almost everything during the COVID-19 pandemic, our programs need to adapt to current realities. Even though current rules might make it possible for us to meet at the Fortnightly, most of us are not ready yet to venture into a larger group in an enclosed space. Therefore, we are planning programs through January that everyone can attend virtually via a video conference application called Zoom. Joining Zoom is free, and you can download the app onto your computer, tablet, or smart phone. You can even listen to the presentation on your phone if you are not tech savvy. If you are new to Zoom, or need a brush-up, we can recommend some good YouTube tutorials and will offer a practice session. Watch for further information about tutorials. I'm looking forward to this new, unconventional year at FAW.

Tammie Bob *FAW President*


Program Committee

We sent out a link to a FAW Program Survey and preliminary results are in. Forty-four FAW members have responded and the results seem encouraging. Here are the current results:

90% will be rejoining FAW this year (Yay! We need your membership more than ever.)

67% Are interested in attending a virtual program on Zoom. 20% Maybe, 11% Not interested.

12% Would be interested in a Zoom tutorial.

 If you have not renewed your membership for this upcoming year but intend on rejoining, please return the renewal form and payment ASAP.

The FAW program committee chairperson this year is new member, Joan Gordon. Joan is professor Emerita of English at Nassau Community College in New York where she taught composition, American literature, science fiction, and literature of the Holocaust. She reads extensively and has published numerous books and articles about science fiction. Welcome to the FAW board and Program Committee!

Enriching and entertaining programs are important to all of us, especially during these perplexing times. FAW is planning meetings using Zoom to deliver programs to FAW members for September – January. Here is a tentative schedule of programs. We will keep you updated as the program schedule is finalized. We should all be getting adept at moving targets by now.

→FRIDAY September 25, FAW Awards Program. The five winning authors will discuss their books and the awards committee members will explain why each book was chosen as a winner.

→ WEDNESDAY Oct. 21, FAW Foundation Scholarship winner presentation. A Master of Fine Arts student in creative writing from Columbia College will read a bit of their work then a Columbia College creative writing professor will talk about the writing program and the pleasures and pitfalls of teaching a subject that is somewhat abstract.

→Other events discussed: Election/political related program, Musical performers, Science fiction author discussion, cooking discussion, travel.

Oh how I wish I could travel again!

Great entertaining video on YouTube - The value of travel | Rick Steves <https://youtu.be/kYXiegTXsEs>

Books

***World Walk* by Steven Newman**

World Walk is the story of newspaper writer Steven Newman who at the age of 28 packed his bag to start a four-year long journey around the world on foot. He walked his way across 22 countries in 5 continents. He shares heartfelt stories of the people he meets along the way, as well as wild adventures including arrests, wars, blizzards, wild animal attacks, wildfires, and more. A lesson of hope and love told through the exciting adventures of independent budget backpacking.

***In A Sunburned Country* by Bill Bryson**

In A Sunburned Country follows Bill's hilarious journey through the sunbaked deserts and endless coastlines of Australia, trying not to get killed by the deadly wildlife. It's full of fun & interesting facts about the country. It's not your typical guidebook to Australia, but a must-read if you plan on traveling there. He really gives you a sense of the place, its quirks, and the people using some very entertaining storytelling and history.

***The Cat Who Went to Paris* by Peter Gethers**

The Cat Who Went To Paris is Peter Gethers' global journeys with a cat named Norton. It puts a dose of adorable humor into many common travel situations. Norton accompanies Gethers on filmmaking trips and helps convince the love of his life that he is the one. After years of adventuring the three settles in New York. Norton is one of the city's most well-traveled felines.

Escape with Me!

<i>The Lost City of the Monkey God</i>	Douglas Preston	Nonfiction, History, Travel
<i>The Glass Hotel</i>	Emily St. John Mandel	Fiction
<i>A Summer of Secrets</i>	Lorna Peel	Fiction, Romance, Mystery, England
<i>Onions in the Stew</i>	Betty MacDonald	Nonfiction, Humor, Memoir
<i>A Honeybee Heart Has Five Openings</i>	Helen Jukes	Nonfiction, Memoir, Nature, Environment

Book Review of *The Municipalists* by Seth Fried

Paperback 272 pages, Penguin Books (March 19, 2019)

Reviewed by Ida Hagman

May, 2020

Imagine a government agency that would collect data on cities and fund programs to improve city life. Let's say people's commutes are getting longer or that employment is stagnating or that high school test scores continue to drop. This agency would fund programs, monitor results, and give advice to solve these issues. Wouldn't it be great if we had the resources to do that, to nip problems in the bud? Imagine using our resources to improve things, rather than react to emergencies? In his novel *The Municipalists*, Seth Fried has created just such an agency, The United States Municipal Survey (USMS).

The novel begins in a golden age of urban planning and an era of collective optimism. This idyllic mood is destroyed when the agency is attacked by terrorists, and a cyber-attack scrambles the supercomputer that runs the agency. Phones explode and government drones rain from sky. Henry, a mild-mannered bureaucrat the narrator, and OWEN, a 3D projection of the agency's supercomputer, set out to find and immobilize the terrorists. These two are an odd couple and a source for rich comedy.

Henry is a loner bureaucrat, a total rule follower, who is mocked behind his back. His deadpan descriptions of his interactions with coworkers are hilarious. Contrary to our expectations, OWEN, the AI holographic projection, is the Oscar to Henry's Felix. OWEN borders on a source for chaos, focusing on trifles such as the color of his tie, while Metropolis is in jeopardy. OWEN has created a program to make him drunk, and he enjoys his inebriation, which frustrates and worries Henry.

Henry and OWEN take off to find the mastermind behind the terrorist attack and to find Sarah Laury, the daughter of the mayor of Metropolis. Manic action follows.

Seth Fried is the author of *The Municipalists*, and the acclaimed short story collection *The Great Frustration*. He is a recurring contributor to The New Yorker's "Shouts and Murmurs" and NPR's "Selected Shorts," and his stories have appeared in Tin House, One Story, McSweeney's Quarterly Concern, The Kenyon Review, Vice, and elsewhere. He is also the winner of two Pushcart Prizes.

What FAW Members Are Reading Now

Roberta Gates

Notes on a Silencing by Lacy Crawford - a memoir about St. Paul's, a prestigious boarding school in New Hampshire, which includes both good and bad experiences.

All for Nothing by Walter Kempowski - historical fiction focusing on East Prussian refugees trying to escape the Soviets at the end of WW II.

Hidden Valley Road by Robert Kolker - an examination of schizophrenia as seen through the lens of one family.

Commonwealth by Ann Patchett - a novel about a blended family as told from the points of view of several siblings.

My Dark Vanessa by Kate Elizabeth Russell - a "Me Too" novel about a student preyed on by a teacher which illustrates very effectively how a young girl can mistake abuse for love.

The Cut Out Girl by Bart van Es - a nonfiction book about a Jewish girl, now in her 80s who was hidden during WW II by her Dutch neighbors, and the long-lasting impact that had on her.

Christine Spatara

Shadow of the Wind by Carlos Ruiz Zafón - Zafón died recently at age 55. I am loving the book the second time around.

Olive Again by Elizabeth Strout - Always a good reading but the tough Olive is depressing as she faces old age.

Beneath a Scarlet Sky by Mark Sullivan – Epic tale which takes place in Milan under German occupation.

Ida Hagman

I am listening to *Saving Ruby King* by Catherine Adel West. It's a first novel by a Chicago author. Set in the South Side of Chicago, an enthralling story of a young woman determined to protect her best friend while a long-buried secret threatens to unravel both their families.

Karen Pulver

I just read *Year of Miracles* by Geraldine Brooks. Beautifully written but with plague theme.

Pat Adelberg

The Glass Lake by Maeve Binchy - This is the story of lives, lives affected by secrets and lies and choices made by a handful of people. If you love Binchy – read it.

Carol Eshaghy

Valentine by Elizabeth Wetmore - debut novel that explores the lingering effects of a brutal crime on the women of one small Texas oil town in the 1970s.

The Vanishing Half by Brit Bennett - Features black twin sisters, whose skin is so light that they can pass for white. Two different paths: One chooses black. The other white. Their choices reflect societal norms, gender constructs, and racial inequality in contemporary America.

Joan Gordon

Seth Fried, *The Municipalists*. This was an FAW winner and so I wanted to read it. It is a spin on Batman but with city planners as the superheroes and villains. I liked the speculations about how municipal planning has always favored the elites and how ruinous that is in the long run.

N.K. Jemison, *The City We Became*. Jemison is a New Yorker and she speculates that the city and all its boroughs are becoming sentient, alive, all to think about the same city problems that Fried sees. These two books make an interesting pair, and both are beautifully written.

Michael Zapata, *The Lost Book of Adana Moreau*. This is a book about depression era Chicago, Katrina era New Orleans, lost cities of South America, and a wonderful lost book. Beautifully written and strange.

Velma Wallis, *Two Old Women*. Now for something completely different. This very short retelling of an Alaskan native story is about two old women left behind by their tribe who decide that if they are going to die, they should die trying. A dear friend gave it to me.

Jo Walton, *Or What You Will*. This is a story about a writer at the end of her career, her muse, Florence, As You Like It, and The Tempest. Absolutely captivating.

Merlin Sheldrake, *Entangled Life: How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds and Shape Our Futures*. Nonfiction about fungi, and fascinating. What you learn about mushrooms and all their relatives shows how interconnected the whole world is and is sure to inspire lots of fiction.

FAW 2020 - 2021 Officers	Committee Chairs
President - <i>Tammie Bob</i> Vice President - <i>Christine Spataro</i> Secretary - <i>Dale Davison</i> Treasurer - <i>Vivian Mortensen</i>	Newsletter Editor - <i>Karen Baker</i> Foundation Fund - <i>Edith Riley, Roberta Gates</i> Literature Awards - <i>Ida Hagman, Karen Pulver</i> Young People's Awards - <i>Angela Gall</i> Luncheon - Social - <i>Carol Eshaghy</i> Membership - <i>Karen Burnett</i> Programs - <i>Joan Gordon</i> Revisions - <i>Pat Schneider</i> Sustaining Clubs - <i>Diana Adams</i> Yearbook & Awards Program - <i>Pat Adelberg</i> Website Manager - <i>Karen Baker</i>

FAW 2020 – 2021 meeting dates
 9/25/2020, 10/21/2020, 11/11/2020,
 12/9/2020 and 1/13/2021,
 2/10/2021, 3/10/2021, 4/14/2021
 and 5/07/2021.

Contact FAW
 Tammie Bob – 630.858.1582 Membership –
 474 Stagecoach Run info@fawchicago.org
 Glen Ellyn, IL 60137 News –
 Newsletter@fawchicago.org