

Writing in Fairfield

GOING PUBLIC WITH ONE'S INNER VOICE



PETER BAKER

written by Rita Papazian

GREENFIELD HILL was once filled with the sounds of Richard Rodgers writing Broadway musicals with Oscar Hammerstein, and Leonard Bernstein composing his works in his studio. Just a stone's throw away, on Redding Road, poet Robert Penn Warren and his writer wife Eleanor Clark created their works of literature. And nearby, Anatole Broyard pounded out his *New York Times* book reviews on his typewriter. Years have passed, but much remains the same.

Today, in attics and basements across Fairfield, noted and upcoming writers continue the tradition of writing here in town.

One of them is Pat Jordan. In the early 70s, before he became a nationally acclaimed writer, Jordan climbed the stairs to his attic in the Stratfield section of town, after a day of teaching at an all-girls Catholic high school in Bridgeport and after his wife and five children went to bed. As he recounts in the author's

note of *The Best Sports Writing of Pat Jordan*, published this year, he "set up a desk and a manual typewriter, sat down, and tried to write. [He] wrote snippets of dialogue, description, narration, and exposition, all of which existed only as exercises, not complete stories."

Jordan's writing career has come a long way from snippets. In addition to his magazine articles, Jordan's books include *A False Spring*, a memoir about his failed minor league pitching career, described

by *Time* magazine as “one of the best and truest books about baseball and about coming to maturity in America.”

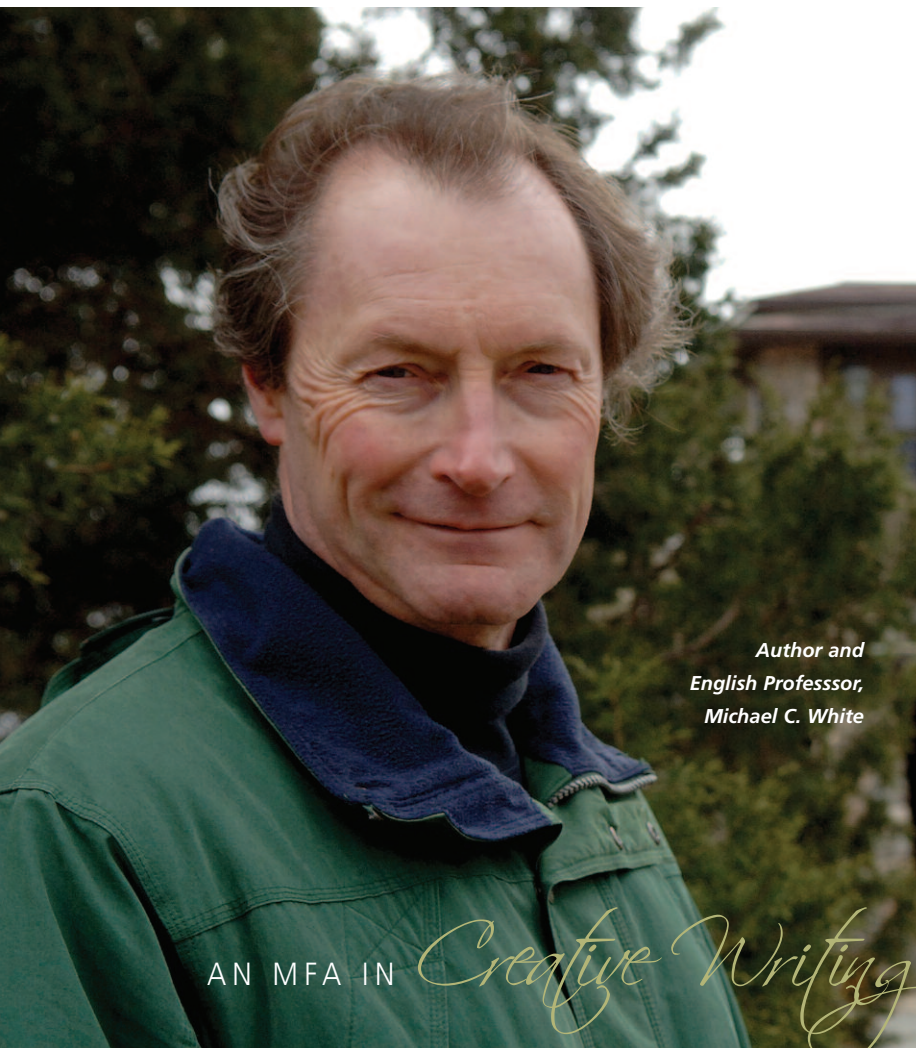
Hoping to follow in Fairfield Prep grad Jordan’s footsteps is another Fairfield Prep alumnus. Christian Sauer graduated high school in June and this fall entered Fairfield University determined to follow a path that began “in his heart.” Sauer wants to be a writer. “He has always been a gifted reader, storyteller, and writer,” says Glenn Sauer (chairman of Fairfield U’s biology department) of his son. “We have always told him that he should go where his passion lies.”

“ Like many writers, [Michael] White enjoys the storytelling aspects of writing. He recalls his father, a farmer and carpenter, telling stories steeped with detail in his native Vermont woods.”

Sauer is steadfast in his desire to be a writer; even more so following an online chat last spring with notable fiction writer Michael C. White, author of *Soul Catcher* and the just published *Beautiful Assassin*, among other works. As a professor of English at Fairfield U, White teaches fiction writing, literature, and publishing. And this year, at White’s sug-

gestion, Fairfield University is launching a new MFA in Creative Writing. White is the program director. (See Sidebar.)

Like many writers, White enjoys the storytelling aspects of writing. He recalls his father, a farmer and carpenter, telling stories steeped with detail in his native Vermont woods. His father enjoyed the art of oral storytelling, and



Author and
English Professor,
Michael C. White

In addition to awaiting the debut of his sixth novel, author and English professor Michael C. White is busy now with Fairfield University’s inaugural low-residency MFA program in creative writing. The program will attract students from around the country who will meet together twice a year to participate in intensive ten-day residency with nationally renowned writers at Enders Island, off the Mystic coastline. Between residencies, students will work independently with personal mentors to develop their own writing style and skills in fiction, creative non-fiction, and poetry. Guest writers for the first residency (beginning December 28) include novelist Anita Shreve (*The Pilot’s Wife*, *Body Surfing*) and poet Mark Doty (*Fire to Fire: New and Selected Poems, Dog Years*). The MFA mentors, whom White describes as “leaders in their craft,” are novelists, poets, short story writers, and memoirists, including Nicholas Rinaldi, who the Fairfield Arts Council honored with its annual “Artist of the Year” in 2007. For more information, visit fairfield.edu/mfa.

AN MFA IN *Creative Writing* THROUGH FAIRFIELD UNIVERSITY

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Winter Words

WRITERS CONFERENCE RETURNS TO THE FAIRFIELD PUBLIC LIBRARY

Building upon the success of its inaugural writers conference last year, Fairfield Public Library will sponsor its second annual Winter Words Writers Conference on Saturday, December 6, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Main Library.


The library's nonprofit volunteer organization, the Friends of the Fairfield Public Library, hosts the conference with the purpose of bringing aspiring writers together with published writers and to build mentorship. "Writers and libraries are a natural fit," says Library Director Maura Ritz. "The success of the Winter Words Writers Conference at the Library proved that."

Deputy Town Librarian Karen Ronald received many emails of praise following the conference last year. "That's why I'm a librarian," she said, expressing her satisfaction with the positive experiences of the 128 attendees. As a town librarian, Ronald believes it is important to offer opportunities for writers in the community to network, hear new ideas, and maybe come away from such a conference with the tools to make the dream of writing a book become a reality.

This year's conference will include the following new sessions: screenplay writing, sports writing, agent panel, literary fiction, business writing or the business of writing, author and agent relationships, and young adult literature. And, like last year, the conference will offer a panel on children's literature and an opportunity for manuscript review. A new feature will be a breakfast with "mystery authors" in which conference attendees can sit down at a table (for breakfast) with an author and have the opportunity to ask questions.

Included among the more than 25 conference presenters are Sara Nelson, Editor-in-Chief of Publishers Weekly and Michael C. White, notable author of six novels and Professor of English at Fairfield University.

Friends President Jim Buggy says: "The conference supports our mission to be able to provide the community, and these local writers, with programs and services right here in our own library. This is a fantastic opportunity." Registration for the Winter Words Writers Conference is \$50, with an additional \$10 for the Mystery Author Breakfast, and \$30 for the Manuscript Review. For more information about the Second Annual Winter Words Writers Conference call 256-3160; or visit fairfieldpubliclibrary.org.



Marcela Landres addresses a group of writers at the 2007 Winter Words Conference at the Fairfield Public Library.

his father's influence echoes in White's own novels. Who better to counsel a budding author like Sauer than White... whose 2002 novel, *A Dream of Wolves*, is going through its second screenwriting in Hollywood?

With the proliferation of writers today, in towns all over the country, one wonders if there is a market for all of this written material. Tracy Brown, former Editor-in-Chief of Book-of-the-Month Club recently told members of the Connecticut Press Club that "a lot of people want to write books, but not a lot of people want to read."

White acknowledges that may be true, yet he has encouraged Sauer to follow his heart and pursue writing. "There will always be a coterie [of readers] well into Sauer's grandchildren's generation," said White. He noted that he recently attended an appearance of author Tobias Wolff at a "Join in the Conversation" event (co-sponsored by WSHU and Sacred Heart University), and that hundreds of people from the community attended.

The author does acknowledge that earning a living by writing full-time is often difficult, and that many writers also teach. White says, "...you're going to

have to do something else while you write. So many people I know have other professions. They are doctors, psychologists, teachers, and housewives, but they are passionate about writing."

White's advice to Sauer and others interested in pursuing writing? "If you're going to be a writer, you have to write every day and read other writers as well. As with anything, you have to practice."


Freelance writer Stacy Lytwyn Maxwell agrees, and knows that writing and getting published is a job that requires hard work and dedication. Maxwell, who wrote and published *Consummate Connecticut: Day*

Trips with Panache, also created a course for the Fairfield Continuing Education program called “How to Write/Publish the Book You Always Wanted To.” The first time she taught the course she expected to limit the registration to eight people. The response was overwhelming...she extended it to nineteen

The sheer number of locals who are interested in writing has led to the formation of various writers groups in town, including some at the Fairfield Public Library. Last winter, Karen Ronald, Deputy Town Librarian, organized several writers groups at the library. In addition, she established in November of this year a writers room within the library and is also interested in building a resource collection of books for writers. (Throughout the year, she has also invited authors to speak at programs open to the public.)

“I want to fill a gap in [library] services,” Ronald says. “We want to support and encourage writers. We want people to be active and supportive and grow in the writing community.”

Joan Srager, who has written a young adult book about growing up in Washington Heights in the 1950s, is one of the facilitators of a library-sponsored writers group that formed following last December’s inaugural writers conference. (See Sidebar). “For me personally, I need

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Karen Ronald / Deputy Town Librarian

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We're Always Close to Home

the discipline of the group experience,” she says. She is motivated by the fact that she must have a writing sample ready to present to the group at each meeting, and she enjoys the critiques. “It’s hard to criticize your own work,” she notes.

Local resident and non-fiction author Sarah Parsons, who has enjoyed a successful career in publishing, also belongs to a writers group. She meets with three other

women for two hours once a month. For the past year, Parsons has been writing a memoir, the experience of which she considers a transition from writing non-fiction to her desire to be a fiction writer. The memoir is about one year in her life when she was twelve years old.

Parsons recalls the joy in reading, especially as a child, and coming to that “ah, ha moment...Oh, I know that feel-

ing. I know as a little girl I got lost in my reading. I want to give those ‘ah ha’ moments to others.”

Parsons’ advice for getting a book published is simple: all you have to do is go to the bookshelves in a bookstore and see what is NOT on the shelves. In other words, “Write to the hole on the shelf.” However, after many years writing non-fiction, Parsons said it is not easy to dis-



GEORGE FURFURNEY

“ I know as a little girl I got lost in my reading. I want to give those ‘ah ha’ moments to others.”

Sarah Parsons / local writer

PUBLISHING

Dos and Don'ts

Jacquelyn Smith may be new to publishing, but she brings a perspective that is quite original. Smith, who founded her publishing company, A.M. Green Publishing House in Greenfield Hill last year, believes there are many good writers attempting to have their books published. However, says Smith, if a book has one of a number of blatant errors, publishing houses and agents won't even consider the content. "There are many reasons why good books don't get on the market," said Smith, and some of them "have nothing to do with content."

Smith offers a list of things to do-and not to do-to give your manuscript the best chance of being reviewed:

1. Make sure the book's subject matter fits in with the kind of books the publishing house publishes.
2. Establish a track record of your writing published in other forms of media, such as newspapers and magazines. Keep a portfolio of your work.
3. Deal with publishing houses that are receptive to first-time authors.
4. Don't sell yourself short on your resume. Present your biographical information in a way that demonstrates why you should be the individual to write the book.
5. Make sure your book proposal or manuscript and any correspondence to the publisher are free of grammar and spelling errors.
6. Look at your book idea in terms of the cost it would take to publish the book. For example, does the book require a lot of color work or legal fees in getting the rights to any materials in the book? Coffee table books are very costly.
7. Keep children's books short. More than 32 pages adds to the printing costs.
8. Be willing to promote the book through book signings. Is there anything about you that will help promote sales for the book?
9. Know the competition. Does the book fill a niche in the marketplace?

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ALL MAJOR CREDIT CARDS ACCEPTED

cipline herself to write a memoir. That's where her writers group is the most helpful. It forces her to write every day.

While Parsons is transitioning from non-fiction to fiction, some Fairfielders are transitioning from one career to that of author. Southport resident Bob Runk, for example, has enjoyed a lucrative career as an insurance broker for many years. In the spring of 2007, Runk's book, *How to Line Up Your Fourth Putt*, was published by Doubleday, a division of Random House. The edition was an expanded version of Runk's self-published book from 1990. The 1990 version drew the attention of an agent who couldn't believe that Runk had sold 55,000 copies through his own marketing.

Runk attributed his early success with the book to his taking a booth at the annual Gift Show at the Javits Center in New York City. Then he got his books onto the shelves at Brooks Brothers. His first print run was 2,000, which sold out quickly. "It was the only colorful thing on the shelf," said Runk, who is working on a sequel to the golf book, titled *When to Regrip Your Ball Retriever*.

Many local writers are not waiting for big publishing houses to notice their manuscripts. Self-publishing is very popular today, and thanks to Borders in Fairfield, these writers have an opportunity to share their books with the reading public. For the past four years, many authors have been featured in the bookstore's monthly "New Author Roundtable," which district marketing manager Craig Kennedy says, welcomes published and self-published authors.

Kennedy said the original purpose was to "showcase writers that people hadn't heard of." The event's popularity spread through word-of-mouth and many published authors contacted Kennedy or Dianne Defonce, the Roundtable moderator, requesting to participate. In 2007, Borders welcomed 144 authors to the Roundtable. That's a lot of reading, especially for Defonce, who makes sure she reads all the books. Defonce touts the camaraderie that the Roundtable generates. The authors get to explain their books. Often discussions lead away from the book itself, to how and why the author wrote the book, or to questions and comments about publishing.

Local writer Carl Palmieri has previewed some of his ten self-published books at the Roundtable. These small, soft-cover books are compilations of sayings and words of wisdom from family members, friends, and employees that he had written down on pieces of paper. He also publishes books to help people

OTHER FAIRFIELD

Writers of Note

© **JACK CAVANAUGH**, an adjunct English professor at Fairfield University, is the author of *Gene Tunney: Boxing's Brainiest Champ* and *His Upset of the Great Jack Dempsey*. His latest book, *Giants Among Men: How Robustelli, Huff, Gifford, and the Giants Made New York a Football Town and Changed the NFL*, was just published by Random House.

© **PATRICIA REILLY GIFF**, cofounder and partner in Dinosaur's Paw, the children's bookstore on the Post Road, is author of more than 60 books for children, including the *Polk Street School* series, and most recently *Eleven*, published by Random House last January. She is two-time winner of the Newberry Honor for *Pictures of Hollis Woods* and *Lily's Crossing*, which is also a Boston Globe—Horn Book Honor Book; Randomhouse.com/features/patriciareillygiff/books.htm.

© **JOAN ELIZABETH GOODMAN**, who was born and raised in Fairfield, is an illustrator, and author of numerous children's books and novels, which include *Songs from Home*, *The Winter Hare*, *Peregrine*, *Paradise*, and *Hope's Crossing*.

© **DON HARRISON** is the author of *Connecticut Baseball: The Best of the Nutmeg State* published this month by The History Press.

© **JIM MOTAVALLI**, former Editor of *E/The Environmental Magazine*, is the author of *Naked in the Woods: Joseph Knowles and the Legacy of Frontier Fakery*; Motavalli is also the author of *Forward Drive* and *Breaking Gridlock*, published by the Sierra Club. He edited *E Magazine's Green Living* and *Feeling the Heat*, published by Plume, an imprint of Penguin. Currently, he is working on a sequel to *Green Living*, which will be a compilation of *E Magazine's* "Earth Talk," a weekly column that is published in 1,600 newspapers across the country.


© **WILL STAEGER** is the author of *Painkiller*, a gritty spy thriller and its sequel, *Public Enemy*, which was published this past June; Willstaeger.com.

© **NINA NELSON** is the author of *Bringing The Boy Home*, published this summer by HarperCollins; Ninanelsonbooks.com.

recover from addictions. "It's a great place to learn, and to network with other writers," Palmieri says. "You get so much knowledge from other authors. You get some great ideas."

As many of the local writers have expressed, their love of writing comes from connections—the connection with other writers and the connection with

books. But, most of all, it's the connection with oneself.

As T.S. Eliot once wrote, "We shall not cease from exploration. And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time." 

Rita Papazian is the author of *Remembering Fairfield: Famous People & Historic Places*.



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