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## From the Editor

Hello Pages of the Past followers! I hope all is going well in your world – or should I say as well as can be expected during these tumultuous days and times. I think 2020 truly is a year where history repeats itself – in more ways than one. Fortunately, we still have our books, be it reading them or writing them (or both) to help keep us sane.

In today's issue we welcome author Johanna Wittenberg. Her books, *The Norse Queen* and *The Falcon Queen*, take us back in time. She transports us to a world that happened long before my favorite decade to write about, the 1930s. Skip back hundreds of years further to the Viking days to get a sense of where you'll go when you read her books.

I'm excited to say that I see a lot of new books heading in our direction. Almost every week in August and September are slotted to feature new books from many of the authors that have visited Pages of the Past over the past year.

Stay tuned for future issues –In the weeks ahead we have author interviews scheduled with Caleb Pirtle III, DK Marley, Anne Louise Bannon, Gini Grossenbacher, and more!

*Trisha*

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## Oral Histories

As authors of historical fiction, often the information we glean during our research phase is from oral histories of people that have first-hand information of people, places, or events of long ago. Following is an excerpt from a class I held on writing your family history that has some tips about interviewing people.



In 1916, the Mountain Chief of the Piegan Blackfeet participated in a recording session with ethnologist Frances Densmore, who traveled the American West collecting Native music and reminiscences.

Are you interviewing family members for their stories? Do you think about it, but don't get around to it? Not sure where to start?

Here are some tips for interviewing people to glean information and tales of the past.

1. **Do it now.** This is I think one of the most important. Oh, how I wish I could go back in time fifteen or twenty years and listen to more stories from Grandma. I'd listen more intently, not with just half my attention. And I'd take notes. And record her! We think we'll have time. Next month. Next summer. When I'm not so busy. And then – it's too late. So do it now.

2. **Plan multiple visits if possible.** You're not going to get everything in one visit. You're not going to cover 60-70-80 years of memories in an afternoon. The best time I had with my mom was when I took a week and flew to California. I picked her up and we drove to Arizona to see my kids and grandkids. We spent several days there and drove back. I took notes the whole week. One memory begets another. It seems that once we take a trip back in time, other memories start surfacing over the next few days and weeks.

3. **Don't do too much at once.** Plan for breaks. Several hours is a good period. If you try to go all day, it will be fatiguing – to you and to the person you're interviewing. The visit with my mom worked well, even though it was over a period of many days because we weren't constantly 'interviewing.' It was conversations in between driving, visiting, eating, relaxing, etc. Most likely the person you'll be interviewing is older, so be considerate. Realize that this process may be tiring for them.

4. **Make notes, and record if possible.** I didn't record any conversations with my mom, but I have a legal pad full of notes. Unfortunately, when I go to look at those notes four or five years later, some of my cryptic notes that made so much sense at the time now look like nonsense and I have no idea what I meant by my scribbles. Most people now have phones that can easily – and unobtrusively – record your interviews.

5. **Ask ahead of time if there are photographs available that you can look at.** If this doesn't come up until you're with the individual for your interview session, it may not be possible to access photographs. Often, they're buried deep in a closet or in a storage bin. If they know ahead of time, it will be easier for them to have photographs available, which are a great source of prompts.

6. **Ask open ended questions.** Open ended questions, those that don't require yes or no answers, gather more responsive answers. Instead of asking 'Did you like being raised on a farm? (Answer – yes or no – and you're done), ask 'What was it like being raised on a farm?'

7. **If possible, visit at their home.** Especially if they're elderly. They may be more comfortable at home in their own environment. Also, being home may prompt memories that wouldn't surface if you're sitting in a loud, busy restaurant for your interview.

8. **Be Patient.** Many elderly people speak slowly and softly. Some are hard of hearing. In our excitement about getting to the gold nuggets we've been searching for; we don't want to rush full speed ahead. We may need to slow down a notch or two to match their energy levels.

[The Legacy Project](#) has six terrific questions to ask:

1. If a young person asked you, "What have you learned in your \_\_\_\_ years in this world," what would you tell him or her?
2. Some people say that they have had difficult or stressful experiences, but they have learned important lessons from them. Is that true for you? Can you give an example?
3. As you look back over your life, do you see any "turning points"; that is, a key event or experience that changed the course of your life or set you on a different track?
4. What would you say you know now about living a happy and successful life that you didn't know when you were twenty?
5. What can younger people do to avoid having regrets later in life?
6. What would you say are the major values or principles that you live by?

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## Author Spotlight: Johanna Wittenberg

Today I'm excited to introduce you to Johanna Wittenberg. She has taken the historical fiction genre to heart. Her books take us way back in time, many hundreds of years before the times I write about myself. Welcome to the world of the Vikings – more specifically the world of strong women Vikings. I think, much like I did, you'll find your world expanded after reading what Johanna shares with us today.



**Hello Johanna! Welcome to Pages of the Past. I'm excited to chat with you today because when I write historical fiction, I generally write from 1850-1940, with the 1930s being my favorite era. But you? You've taken historical fiction even further and with your books have gone way back to ninth century Norway. What led you to tell your tales set in this time period?**

Hello, Trisha. Thanks for having me on Pages of the Past.

I have been fascinated by the Viking Age since my college days, when I assisted my mother, an artist, in researching Viking Age art. In fact, my cover designer has incorporated her artwork into my covers.

The early Viking Age was a time in Scandinavia when women could be equals with men. Current research has proven that women were war leaders, rulers, and far-ranging travelers. The Oseberg ship burial has been a source of fascination for me. One of the most elaborate burials of the Viking era, its sole occupants were two women. Nobody knows for sure who they were, but they were very powerful and prominent women to be buried in such a way. These women were of equal status to kings.

For many years, the Oseberg ship was believed to have been the grave of my main character, Queen Åsa. Recently, dendrochronological dating has shed some question on that idea, but the time period is within a few decades. Åsa's burial would have been much like this one. The ship contained a wealth of household goods, from cookware to looms to some of the finest Viking Age tapestries ever found, as well as what has been interpreted as magical equipment.

Åsa lived in a time when everyone believed in magic, ghosts, witches, elves, and spirits, whether they were Christian or pagan. I have always been fascinated by the magical past and wanted to write about a time period where magic was a part of everyday life.

**You have two books. *The Norse Queen* released earlier this year and *The Falcon Queen* will be releasing in about a month. Can you tell us a little bit about each of these books?**

*The Norse Queen* is based on the story of the semi-legendary Queen Åsa. The sources state that she avenged her father's murder and regained control of his kingdom. However, the written record was created 400 years after the fact, by Icelandic men whose culture was very different than Åsa's. Their society had turned against powerful women, so I had to take much of what they wrote with a grain of salt.

Åsa ruled for 20 years, apparently alone, but nothing has been recorded of her reign. The sources skip on to her son, Halfdan the Black, and her grandson, the famous Harald Fairhair. So, I took it upon myself to fill in those missing 20 years, starting with the second book, *The Falcon Queen*. I tried to imagine the first years of her reign. She was starting over with truly little after the devastation of her kingdom. Who were her enemies, and her allies? A woman ruling alone must have had to fend off attacks and marriage proposals from powerful men. How did she develop the power to withstand them?

**I'm sure that researching ninth century Norway is drastically different than the research I do for 1930s America. What researching methods have you used to gather the details you need for your books?**

Yes, as I mentioned, there is very little written evidence, and that is not reliable. Nearly everything is archeological, and fortunately for me there has been a great resurgence of archeological activity regarding the Viking Age in the past 10-15 years. There is a lot of rich information that is very recent. Much of my research has been online, following the work of Scandinavian archeologists.

I have traveled to Norway twice to see the country where Åsa lived and visit Norway's marvelous museums. To see the things my characters used in everyday life 1200 years ago was amazing. In Oslo I spent a lot of time in the Viking Ship Museum as well as the University of Oslo Museum of Cultural History and had the good fortune to meet with one of the archeologists, Marianne Vedeler.

I have visited several Viking Age halls, traveled by land from Oslo around the southern cape of the country and on up to Bergen, where I took the Hurtigruten ferry on a six-day passage from Bergen, north through the fjord country, and around the North Cape. In the remote Lofoten Islands I attended an authentic Viking feast, complete with warriors and sorceresses who were quite convincing.



**I noticed that your Amazon and Goodreads author photo has you standing with a falcon perched on your arm. Were you interested in falconry before you wrote your second book, or is that an interest your writing led you to?**

I became interested in falconry while I was writing my first book, *The Norse Queen*. The Vikings used birds of prey in hunting and some of the best raptors are native to Norway.

When I visited the UK, I was thrilled to discover that falconry was alive and well and there were many hands-on opportunities for the layman to learn about the art. The photo of me holding the peregrine tercel (a male) was taken in York.

Peregrine falcons are the fastest animals on earth, diving on their prey at speeds up to 200 miles per hour. Not only can they see much farther than humans, but they can process what they see much faster and distinguish colors beyond the spectrum humans can perceive.

**What discrepancies did you notice between the Viking era and our contemporary times that made a difference in your writing?**

The biggest differences were: how tough they must have been; the fact that they believed in magic as an everyday thing and never tried to explain things away. They were so in touch with the natural world. Human life was valued very differently, and slavery was the norm the world over. There again it was looked upon very differently than we do. It was very much a “might makes right” society. Yet early Viking Age Scandinavia had a democratic government. Kings were elected and disputes settled at public assemblies governed by oral laws.

**Are there any other books planned for your series? If so, can you tell us a bit about them and when we can watch for them?**

Yes, I am currently working on my third novel, *The Raider Bride*. Ragnhild, a character introduced in *The Falcon Queen*, ran away with this book. She sails to Ireland with her brother, seeking vengeance for her father’s death. Things don’t turn out quite the way she planned...

**Is there anything you’d like to share with us that I didn’t ask you about?**

So much of history was written from men’s points of view, but in reality women were a strong force. Many of their stories have been lost, but in writing this series I am able to bring back some long-forgotten voices.

**Thank you for joining us today, Johanna. We appreciate your time and we congratulate you on your newest release. Please leave a few links where our readers can find you and your books and we’ll go follow and friend you.**



**You can get Johanna's books here:**

<https://www.amazon.com/Norse-Queen-Norsewomen-Book-ebook/dp/B084F235KQ>

<https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B086J9PGD9>

**You can find Johanna here:**

<https://johannawittenberg.com/>

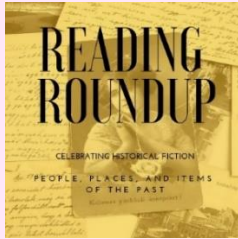
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<https://www.facebook.com/TheNorseQueen>

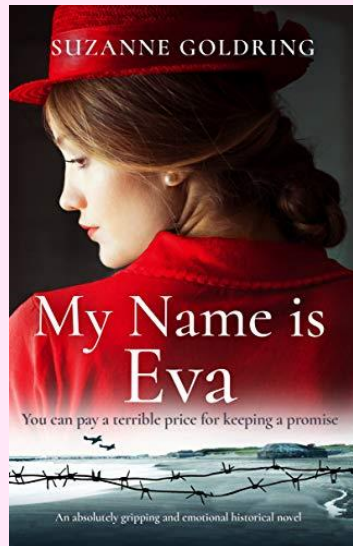
**BIO:** Like her Viking forebears, Johanna Wittenberg has sailed to the far reaches of the world. She lives on a fjord in the Pacific Northwest with her husband, whom she met on a ship bound for Antarctica.

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## The 1940s



### [My Name is Eva](#) **Suzanne Goldring**

You can pay a terrible price for keeping a promise...

Evelyn Taylor-Clarke sits in her chair at Forest Lawns Care Home in the heart of the English countryside, surrounded by residents with minds not as sharp as hers. It would be easy to dismiss Evelyn as a muddled old woman, but her lipstick is applied perfectly, and her buttons done up correctly. Because Evelyn is a woman with secrets and Evelyn remembers everything. She can never forget the promise she made to the love of her life, to discover the truth about the mission that led to his death, no matter what it cost her...

When Evelyn's niece Pat opens an old biscuit tin to find a photo of a small girl with a red ball entitled 'Liese, 1951' and a passport in another name, she has some questions for her aunt. And Evelyn is transported back to a place in Germany known as 'The Forbidden Village,' where a woman who called herself Eva went where no one else dared, amongst shivering prisoners, to find the man who gambled with her husband's life...

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