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From the Editor

I was watching a webinar last week about writing children’s books. Near the beginning of the session, the author walked us through how to check Amazon categories to ensure that we’re choosing a popular category that a lot of people are reading. As opposed to writing in a genre/category that isn’t popular hence translates to fewer sales and less money. This isn’t the first time that this advice has been given.

I wanted to argue though – I want to write what I want to write. I don’t want to worry about if it’s popular enough or if there will be enough readers. I just want to write the stories that germinate in my brain and won’t leave me alone until I write it down.

Fortunately, I was reading a book a few nights ago that gave a different message. In [*escaping into the open: the art of writing true*](#), Elizabeth Berg wrote these words:

HAVE A VISION

Know, as clearly as you can, what your aspirations are, even if you keep them entirely to yourself. Maybe you want to write razzle-dazzle screenplays in Hollywood and take meetings by the pool between parties, massages, and therapy. Maybe you want to pen quiet, literary novels, writing longhand at an old wooden desk, before a tall, curtainless window. Maybe you want to write books that make no demands on the intellect, that just make people laugh or have a good time.

Whatever it is that you want to achieve, honor it as a legitimate goal within yourself first. Then work on it; fan the flames, keep it alive; do not disrespect it.

The bold and italics are my own emphasis. I love when I find validation that resonates with my inner desires. So, onward it is, down the path of writing historical fiction about people, places, and items of the past.

Speaking of being true to our own inner desires, this week’s spotlighted author, Verne Albright, is one who lives and writes by these virtues. His love of Peruvian Paso horses led to his books ***Playing Chess with God*** and ***The Wrath of God***. Read on to see what Verne has to share about his own dedicated journey to the past.

Trisha

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Underground Railroad

I laugh when I think back to my high school days. I remember stepping out of my last history class, vowing that I'd never spend any more of my precious time on days of the past. And now, forty years later, who's the one spending countless hours researching these same days of the past?

The Underground Railroad is one of those subjects that I know was covered in-depth in school. Yet, years later all I have is a vague knowledge of what it was and that slaves escaped using this secretive system. I know the name Harriet Tubman, and that she was instrumental in helping many slaves escape to a life of freedom in the 'north.' Another vague memory is how my mind connects the Underground Railroad with the Civil War period.

In these current days with a seemingly infinite amount of knowledge available with just a few mouse clicks, I sit at my desk and willingly look up countless pieces of information, despite my long-ago vow to never look at history again. And by diving into just a shallow bit of research on the Underground Railroad, I see that this is a fascinating subject with many more layers than my feeble brain retained from those days of required history class.

WHEN THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD WAS USED

Although the peak of the Underground Railroad was in the years from 1850-1860, the need ended at the end of the Civil War when slavery was abolished. But this secretive escape route was used for much longer than I remembered. It actually began being used in the late 17th Century.

WHERE THE ESCAPE ROUTES LED

Although I have a general knowledge that the slaves escaped 'to the north' where they could be free, somehow I always thought in the vague terms of our northern free states. However, what I didn't know was that many of the slaves fled clear to Canada. Per Wikipedia, "One estimate suggests that by 1850, 100,000 slaves had escaped via the "Railroad." Another source claims that more than 30,000 former slaves settled in Ontario during the 20-year peak period.

Another surprise to me was that other escape routes led to Mexico or overseas locations. And an early escape route actually ran south towards Florida. At the time Florida was a Spanish possession (except from 1763-83) and many slaves escaped via this route. However, in 1821 when Florida became a United States territory, this ended the southern migration.

TO QUILT OR NOT TO QUILT

Whether or not quilts were used as codes to pass along information of routes and safe havens is a subject under debate. Folklore claims that quilt designs were used "to signal and direct slaves to escape routes and assistance." However, quilt historians and scholars have disputed these legends. I'd have to do more thorough research on this theory, relying on the expert opinion of the scholars that have conducted even more research than I'd be willing to devote to this issue.

WHERE THE RAILROAD PART CAME FROM

While the railroad played little, if any, part in the escaping slave's journey to freedom, it came to be called the Underground Railroad because of all the railroad terminology in the code.

- People who helped slaves find the railroad were “agents”
- Guides were known as “conductors”
- Hiding places were “stations” or “way stations”
- “Station masters” hid slaves in their homes
- Escaped slaves were “passengers” or “cargo”

WILLIAM STILL’S PARTICIPATION

While hundreds, if not thousands, of empathetic individuals, assisted with this noble feat, many names such as Harriet Tubman or John Brown tend to be more well known for their assistance. One man, William Still, played a huge role. It’s said that he helped hundreds of slaves to escape, sometimes as many as 60 a month. He kept a diary of notes and biographies of many of the people he helped escape. It’s reported that he maintained correspondence with many and sometimes became the middleman in the communication between the escaped slaves and their families and loved ones left behind. In 1872, he published a book [*The Underground Railroad: Authentic Narratives and First-Hand Accounts*](#) that detailed many aspects of how the system worked, along with stories about many of the individuals and families that escaped with his help.

For my own personal writing, since I rarely write during this time period, I probably won’t be using any of this for any writing projects. However, my curiosity is whetted and I want to learn more. The people and the many lives that were impacted over the slavery/freedom debate and the many Americans – black and white – that helped so many thousands of people escape to a life of freedom is something I’d like to delve deeper into, not necessarily as research for my writing, but to grow as a person and to deepen my own compassion for the people and the times past



Harriet Tubman

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In different Facebook groups, I kept seeing these posts from Verne Albright show up, either talking about his newest book, *Playing chess with God*, or sharing a new review. As Verne and I kept running across each other in various groups, usually those related to historical fiction, we started chatting here and there. The more I found out about Verne, his travels, and his passion for Peruvian Paso horses, the more enthralled I became. I was excited when Verne agreed to be a guest author at Pages of the Past.



Welcome, Verne. It's great to have you as our spotlighted author this week. I see that you started writing magazine articles and books to promote Peruvian Paso horses. I should say – writing *professionally* – as it appears that you've been a writer your whole life. I'm curious, how did you transition from the non-fiction world of Peruvian Paso horses to the historical fiction in your two latest books, *Playing Chess with God* and *The Wrath of God*?

I had two strong motives. I wanted to use my imagination and creativity more than factual writing permits. And I wanted to entertain my readers as well as inform them.

When I finish reading a good novel, I feel profoundly grateful to the author for those hours of enjoyment and freedom from everyday cares. I longed to provide that for others.

However, the transition was difficult. Writing fiction and non-fiction are very different, and I had a lot to learn. My main strength in factual writing was covering the subject thoroughly, but in fiction that became a weakness. My early efforts contained too much detail, wandered, and were wordy. It took years to break my bad habits.

Last year, Jack Messenger featured you on one of his posts, [Verne R. Albright: Two Novels and Twenty-Three Years](#). He shared: "He worked on two novels for twenty-three years and in the process received 153 rejection notices from agents and publishers." How were you able to keep going and moving forward, despite 153 rejections?

Fortunately, I never came to the unwise conclusion that my manuscripts were good enough and the publishers/agents simply didn't recognize that. I could always see room for improvement and

went back to work with a vengeance after being turned down, Now I'm grateful for those rejections because I'm very proud of my first two historical novels and wouldn't have been if earlier versions had been published.

Do you have any favorite methods you use in researching your books?

My favorite is interviewing knowledgeable people because they usually have colorful details to pass along. Since I plan to continue setting most of my novels in Peru and have been there 65 times so far, I've had plenty of opportunities.

The disadvantage of this method is that I must stringently verify everything I'm told before using it, which can be difficult. But the advantage is that I get steered to little-known material my readers seem to find fascinating.

What challenges have you found with writing historical fiction?

My biggest difficulty is sticking to my story and resisting the temptation to put in too much historical detail. I do my best to never forget that wonderful quote attributed to several authors: "I try to leave out the parts that people skip."

What is a writing day like for you? Does it differ from when you were writing more factual articles?

I usually write fulltime, starting around eight a.m. and working for about 8 hours. For me, factual writing was easier. There's a ready-made audience that wants all the details and trivia I'm so tempted to force into my fiction. It's comfortable having an audience guaranteed to be interested from page one.

But fiction is not only more challenging for me...it's also more enjoyable because I can put more of myself into it. When necessary I can write for up to 12 hours when I'm working on factual material, but fiction takes more out of me and the quality of my writing declines after 6 - 8 hours. At that point or sooner I switch to research or other less draining activities.

I know there's another book in the works – *Discovering Her Worth*. Can you give us a little teaser about it and let us know when we can look for it?

With pleasure. *Discovering Her Worth* is loosely based on the true story of a woman I greatly admire and will be available from mid-to-late 2020 on Amazon.com. A quick summary:

Malina Yarza—last living member of an aristocratic Peruvian family—inherits Casa Yarza, a business that was world-famous when run by her father but fell millions of dollars in debt under her brother. Almost penniless and with only a finishing school education that taught social skills, she sets out to pay off every single creditor rather than disgrace the family name by declaring bankruptcy.

She deals with tax collectors, banks, and others determined to salvage what they can from Casa Yarza's ruins. Armed with courage, charm, common sense, and creativity she tries to prove something only she believes—that without business experience she can do the impossible...even in Peru at a time when females weren't taken seriously.

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

Yes, please. I'd like to thank you, Trisha, for all you do to help and encourage authors. It's rare for an author to take so much time away from his/her writing to assist others, and I for one am grateful to you.

YOU CAN FIND VERNE'S BOOKS HERE:

Playing Chess with God – A Novel: Historical fiction featuring Henning Dietzel, a poor boy striving to become rich without abandoning his principles. His efforts take him to the 1849 San Francisco Gold Rush, then to a guano island and other booms in Peru.

Chess was Number One on the Calgary *Herald* newspaper's Best-Seller List in February 2019 and is a candidate for the Online Book Club's **Book of the Year** award.

Midwest Book Review magazine said: "Written by an author with a genuine flair for originality, deftly crafted narrative storytelling, and a knack for creating memorable characters."

People can read reviews, a summary, and the first 25 pages **FREE** at Amazon.com:

https://www.amazon.com/Playing-Chess-God-Verne-Albright/dp/1555719198/ref=cm_cr_ar_p_d_pdt_img_top?ie=UTF8

The Wrath of God – A Novel: In this sequel to ***Playing Chess with God***, Henning attempts to rebuild his empire after it's destroyed by a tidal wave. His efforts span the late 1800s and take him to Peru, Chile, and his birthplace in Germany.

Was Number Five on the Calgary *Herald* newspaper's Best-Seller List in February 2019.

Please read the reviews, summary, and the first 25 pages **FREE** at Amazon.com:

https://www.amazon.com/Wrath-God-Verne-R-Albright/dp/1555719295/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=verne+r.+albright&qid=1561304970&s=books&sr=1-1

YOU CAN FIND VERNE HERE:

FACEBOOK: <https://www.facebook.com/verne.albright>

Verne R. Albright - Biography

"My earliest memory," six-foot, nine-inch Verne Albright remembers, "is of an English teacher who assigned a one-page story. The other students' reaction was summed up by a boy who exclaimed, 'How will I ever write a whole page!' I, however, wrote twenty and in the process discovered my life's first passion."

At twenty-one, Verne traveled to Peru and was enchanted by the country and its people. During that first visit he, his wife, and their year-old daughter took a four-month jeep trip in the Andes Mountains. Over the next half-century, he returned to Peru sixty-four times and imported over two hundred of its Paso horses—including a pair he took overland to California, a nine-month trek of more than five thousand miles in eleven nations. Riding much of the way he came face-to-face with killer deserts, witch doctors, bandits, avalanches, poisonous reptiles, vampire bats, and a violent revolution. His next book *Horseback Across Three Americas* is a rewrite of his Best-Seller about that journey.

“Finding a true calling,” Verne once said, “is a miracle experienced by few, and Peru provided me with two. I promoted its Paso horses worldwide for over fifty years. More recently I began writing historical fiction set in its fascinating past and rich culture.”

Verne’s novels are so well written that they’ve already begun appearing on Best-Seller Lists. And why not? He has lived adventures at least as exciting as the ones he writes about.



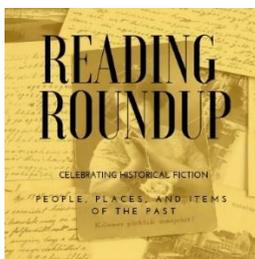
Verne and his horses in the Peruvian desert during his Peru-to-California trek.

"The thing that most attracts me to historical fiction is taking the factual record as far as it is known, using that as scaffolding, and then letting imagination build the structure that fills in those things we can never find out for sure."

Geraldine Brooks

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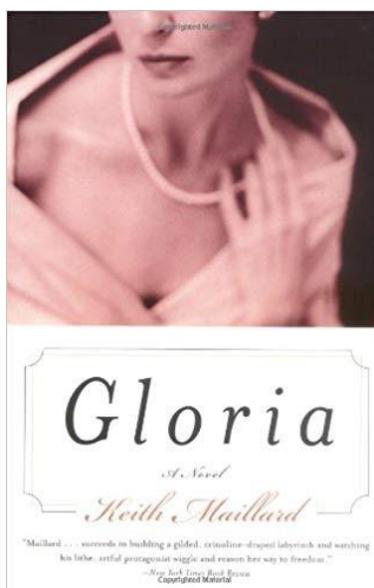
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The 1950s

Gloria: a novel

Keith Maillard



Gloria, a recent college graduate, class of '57, has everything a girl could want. Expected to make a brilliant marriage to a wealthy but conventional man, Gloria finds herself torn between society's expectations and her own search for a future that is both passionate and fulfilling. Her quest uncovers the intensity of desires, the gift of intellectual accomplishment, and the surprising power of friendship.

Gloria is a vivid and intimate portrayal of a privileged yet claustrophobic world, where conflicting expectations for women foreshadow an impending revolution. Gloria Cotter, in her last summer at home before setting out for the larger world, must find her way into an unimaginable future.

Authors: Do you have a historical fiction book or short story that you'd like featured in *Pages of the Past*? Email me at texastrishafaye@yahoo.com to see about scheduling your book or short story in a future issue.

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