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In this issue:

- Conflict in Your Family Story
- Flash Fiction Contest Guidelines
- Author Spotlight: David Ebsworth
- Reading Roundup: Books from the 1940s

From the Editor

Where did the year go? It seems it was just the beginning of the year and I was lining up authors to spotlight in the newsletter that was starting up in April. And *POOF*! Here we are with November almost over, Thanksgiving less than a week away, and Christmas breathing hot and heavy down our necks.

It's also Nano month, National Novel Writing Month, where so many attempt to write 50,000 words in a month. That works out to 1,667 words a day. Or less per day with massive make up days in between. Several of my author friends are meeting – or well ahead – their goal. Not this one. Don't look in my direction. I'm not going to make it this year. Although I did get about 6,000 words written on a new project, so it's not a total loss.

Thinking of prolific authors, our author this week has many fascinating books out, ranging from the late 1700s to 1938. Read on to see what David Ebsworth shares with us about his books and writing historical fiction. His newest book, *Mistress Yale's Diaries*, is due out in a week. There's an intriguing story behind what started this trilogy.

Are you a writer? Do you like to write short stories? Very short? Details follow for a **Flash Fiction Contest**. The top voted story wins one lucky author a \$50 gift card. The contest is open to subscribers to the Pages of the Past newsletter (It's free. Links to sign up are on the contest page.) The deadline for entry is December 20, 2019 (midnight). Stories should be 400-600 words and be written to one of three picture prompts.

The stories will be printed in the January 3rd newsletter. Open voting will run until January 12th. The winner will be announced in the January 17th newsletter. (Photo prompts and all details on pages 4-5)

There are four weeks before the stories are due. Happy writing!

Trisha

texastrishafaye@yahoo.com

Conflict in Your Family Story

(Excerpt from *The Tales We Tell: Writing Your Family History*)

Conflict is a necessary component of a good story. Without conflict or tension, your reader is simply going to close the book and not return. If they don't fall asleep first.

In *The Complete Handbook of Novel Writing*, Alyce Miller addresses that problem in her chapter, Why True-Life Stories Often Don't Make Good Fiction. She writes:

"Another problem with translating directly from real life is that it is only infrequently punctuated by trouble that is interesting. A happy family reunion in which all the relatives are thrilled to see one another, true as it may be, is boring to read about because nothing happens. It lacks the critical elements essential to fiction: conflict or crisis."

Now, maybe in your family, you don't have this dilemma. Maybe there's so much conflict that it seems to be contrived or unrealistic. You may truly have enough drama going on in your real life situations that this is not an issue. But if this isn't the case, what do you do?

Kathy Jacobson mentions a few solutions in her chapter of the same book, Fiction's Connecting Link: Emotion. She writes:

5. Give the Character an Inner Conflict

Why is the character insecure, unhappy, angry, afraid, or frustrated? What motivates him to act? Will he fight or flee? Why? Can you force him into a situation (the conflict of your story) in which he must act against his true nature? If he's a fighter, what would it take to make him run? If he'd normally take flight, what circumstances would make him stand his ground?

Three common ways to add conflict in your family stories are with obstacles and challenges, personal change, and historical events.

Obstacles and Challenges

Possible obstacles and challenges are limitless. They may come from an outside source, such as a failing economy, loss of a job, loss from fire or theft, death of a loved one, damaging relationships, horrific natural events, or any number of devastating events.

The challenges may be of an internal nature, such as battling with alcohol demons, addictions, destructive habits, timidity or aggressive traits, lack of self-confidence, an inability to speak up, or countless others.

The challenges may even be of a physical nature, such as stuttering, deformities, illnesses, genetic illnesses and diseases, and any myriad issues that cause stress and hardship on a person's life.

Personal Change

Personal change and growth inflict its own unique stresses and conflict on a person's life – even if the change and growth is a positive effect. Often, as one person grows, the other loved ones don't know how to react to the changing family dynamics. Sometimes this creates its own problems for each person.

One instance about how personal change can affect a family story is my grandfather's history. As much as I idolized him, was not a perfect man in his younger days. My mom recalls moments in her younger years when her Daddy was drinking, and her Mother was livid. The argument at one house was so bad that Aunt Goldie, who lived next door in the ramshackle shacks in Missouri, came and got the children and took them home with her. Years later, back in Glendora, after the death of little Evan, a neighbor from the local church wouldn't accept payment for the graveside service he conducted. He asked my Grandpa to come to church in lieu of payment. This turned Grandpa's life around. While writing my grandmothers story, brief mentions of these events were included, but I didn't dwell too heavily on these moments. I'm sure that realistically they planned a much larger part in my grandparents earlier days than I reflected.

Historical Events

Historical events are an easy way to add elements of tension into the story, while also introducing historical context to help give added authenticity to your tales. In *Fat and Sassy*, my grandparents fled California and went back to the Ozarks after Pearl Harbor was bombed and the coastal areas of California were worried that they'd be next.

In one of my short stories set in North Texas in the 1930's, the women had to deal with horrendous dust storms, the worst one occurring as they were close to publishing their church cookbook, a real-life item that inspired the story.

In another short story, a Texas family dealt with the devastation of a tornado.

The flu epidemic in the early 1900's was a very real danger that affected families across the nation. There's a vast array of actual events and threats from Mother Nature that you can weave into your story to introduce the element of tension and keep your reader interested in the family tale you tell.

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Need help with background research in writing your historical novel?

I have 18 books and many articles in print on subjects varying from 17th Century life, Salem Witch Trials, pirates, slavery and the Underground Railroad, labor history, and women, to the Civil War and Japan. I just completed researching the 1919 Flu Epidemic for Smithsonian Channel's 'Hidden History' television series.

Reasonable fee includes bibliography with primary sources and websites. Prompt turn-around and fact-checking guaranteed.

Contact Juliet Haines Mofford at jmofford1@yahoo.com

Flash Fiction Contest Guidelines

It's Flash Fiction Contest Time! Enter your flash fiction story for a chance to win a \$50 gift card.

Write a 400-600 word story to one of the three pictures below. Email your entry to texastrishafaye@yahoo.com with 'CONTEST ENTRY – (title of your story)' in the subject line.

Entries are due by **midnight, Friday, December 20th**.

All contestants must be a subscriber to Pages of the Past weekly newsletter. (It's FREE. The ONLY thing you'll receive is the weekly newsletters. Link below.)

The stories will be printed in the January 3rd newsletter. A PDF will be compiled with all the stories and posted on Facebook, allowing others a chance to read the stories and send in their votes. The contest will run until January 12th at midnight. The winner will be announced in the January 17th newsletter.

The winner receives a \$50 gift card.

Use one of the three photographs below as a prompt for your story.





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I love it when the new and the old work together to make a wonderful combination. This is our world today. Thanks to the new – computers and the (mostly) awesome creation of the internet – we can delve deeper into the old – the history, the events, the people of the past – than ever before. And, even better, we can meet and make connections with more people in our life today than I’d ever imagined would be possible.

Not only can we, as writers, research as never before, we can meet new people, learn of new books, and have the most amazing interactions with them. Because of this, today’s guest author, David Ebsworth, visits us from North Wales and tells us about how some of his fascinating books. Pull up a chair and join us as we chat with David.



Welcome David! Your books cover a wide range of years. *The Jacobites’ Apprentice* plays out from 1744-1745. *The Kraals of Ulundi* is set in Africa during 1879. *The Assassin’s Mark* takes place in 1938. And your newest novel, *The Doubtful Diaries of Wicked Mistress Yale* is set in late 17th Century Madras. What draws you to different eras for the settings in your books?

Well, thanks for having me here, Trisha – all the way from across the Pond too.

And when I was a kid, while most of the other lads were reading *Huckleberry Finn* or *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, I was raised on my dad’s favourite book – *Fifty Great Disasters and Tragedies That Shook The World*. That’s true. Originally published in the 1930s and I still have my copy. He used to read chunks of it to me most nights and then I fell in love with those yarns myself. The Titanic disaster. The Charge of the Light Brigade. The Murder of President Lincoln. The Great Fire of Chicago. And I particularly loved those chunks that were almost “stranger than fiction.” But when I started reading historical novels as a teenager I realised that most of my favourite eras – and lots of those “stranger than fiction” bits I loved best – were all a bit neglected by novelists. So when I finally got the chance to start writing myself, I suppose it was natural I’d swing towards those same eras – I guess to write the stories I always wished somebody else had written for me.

Maybe this is a good time to tell us a bit more about your background then?

Well, maybe a good time for a confession too since Ebsworth is really just the pen name (it was my grandfather's name) under which I write. But my real name is Dave McCall and I spent my teenage years in the Sixties, in Liverpool. I only saw the Beatles "live" once – when they came back from one of their USA tours – but I loved music and Liverpool was just, well, **the** place to be. I dabbled with poetry a bit, and I've always written in my spare time but nothing serious. Then I worked in a textile plant, later became a union organiser and ended up working full-time for the union until I retired. I'm married and we've got four kids, nine grandchildren and three great-grandchildren, with a fourth on the way. We live in North Wales now – though still only 30 miles from Liverpool – but we spend chunks of each year in Spain, near Alicante on the Mediterranean coast.

What was your first book and how did it germinate from an idea into a finished product?

This was *Outlander* meets *Deadwood*, I suppose – a novel called *The Jacobites' Apprentice*. It's out of print just now while we produce a second edition. But I was coming up towards retirement, eleven years ago, and wanting to start a new adventure, and writing historical novels seemed just the thing. All that Bonnie Prince Charlie and Jacobites stuff had interested me since *Fifty Great Disasters* and the story of the Glencoe Massacre, or reading *Kidnapped*. And I'd been working in Manchester, England, when I first got the idea for the story. Lots of folk know about Bonnie Prince Charlie – and a lot more since the fabulous Diana Gabaldon started writing the *Outlander* series – and it's generally seen as a "romantic" period of history though, of course, this was actually a pretty vicious end to a hundred years of sporadic civil wars in Britain. And it's a strange but true fact that much of the gold, the sinews of war, through which Bonnie Prince Charlie was able to finance his rebellion was raised through Manchester merchants involved in smuggling the great money-spinning commodity of the day – tea! Murder and mayhem. So I started researching, learning how to write (though some of that early writing makes me wince now) and then spent two years putting the book together. It was published in 2012 – through a self-publishing company called SilverWood Books, that I still use – and went on to become a Finalist in the Historical Novel Society's Indie Awards.

Do you have a favorite era to write in? What do you enjoy most about that era?

You remember the 1964 movie, *Zulu*? It starred Michael Caine and another great British actor, Stanley Baker. It tells the remarkable true story of an incident in the 1879 Anglo-Zulu War when just over 100 British soldiers held out for a day and a night in a mission post called Rorke's Drift against a Zulu army of over 4,000. And then, in 1979, came the prequel, starring Burt Lancaster and others in *Zulu Dawn* – the equally gripping story about how the Zulu warriors, with only spears and shields, had succeeded in wiping out an entire British column, 1,500 men, armed with the most sophisticated European weapons of the day. This was Britain's Little Big Horn. Yet those two events took place almost literally in the first few days of a war that would run on for another six months, and in which almost every week brought yet another "stranger than fiction" twist. And the weirdest thing? By the time I started thinking about that, back in 2012, there were no novels – not a single one – about those later events. And so I wrote *The Kraals of Ulundi*. I'm not sure that this has been my favourite era but it has certainly always been the favourite of my books. I wrote big chunks of it from the perspective of a young Zulu, so it's very different.

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

Travelling, travelling – and travelling. I've always made it a rule never to write about a place without actually visiting the locations. So apart from those set here in Britain, we've had great fun following the journeys taken by my characters across most of 1930s Spain – in *The Assassin's Mark* and *Until The Curtain Falls*. But *The Kraals of Ulundi*, of course, took us all the way to beautiful South Africa and specifically to KwaZulu-Natal, the area that roughly corresponds to the old Kingdom of Zululand – at least until Queen Victoria's army illegally invaded in yet another British Empire land grab.

And this year I was privileged to be back in the USA, this time to speak at the Historical Novel Society Conference and also to make an appearance at the Yale Bookstore in New Haven, Connecticut, for the new book.

Yes, your newest book *The Doubtful Diaries of Wicked Mistress Yale* is the first of a trilogy. Can you tell us a little bit about it and the books that will follow?

Well, there's always an exception to every rule – and this is it! Because we've not yet had the chance to visit India, where *Doubtful Diaries* is set. But it's on the cards and we'll get there soon. And with this one, the “stranger than fiction” bit is really about how I came to write this at all. A couple of years ago I was asked to write a novel about Elihu Yale. Now, that might ring a bell because Yale University is named after him. He was born in Boston in 1649 but his Welsh family soon went back to Britain. Elihu made most of his fortune (which in turn allowed him to make donations in support of what was then a fledgling Connecticut college) while working for the English East India Company at Madras (Chennai) and trading in diamonds – as well as Hindu slaves. And despite being reasonably famous where we now live – he has a very fine tomb in our local churchyard, in Wrexham – he wasn't the sort of character who would normally interest me. But then – purely through serendipity – I came across a copy of his will from the early 1700s. It has a remarkable line: *To my wicked wife...* And then nothing. No bequest. No explanation. Not even her name! I was instantly hooked. Who was this woman? Why wicked? And we began to research the life of Catherine Hynmers Yale. This was really all original research since none of Yale's biographers had bothered very much with poor Catherine – and most of what they'd written turned out to be wrong. Now, there are huge gaps even in what we've uncovered and, like all good historical fiction authors, I've filled those gaps with my own imagination. And instead of one novel, this has now become a trilogy. Part One, *The Doubtful Diaries of Wicked Mistress Yale* (set in old Madras), hit the streets back in March 2019, and Part Two, *Mistress Yale's Diaries, The Glorious Return*, is due out – well, next week. And Part Three of this Yale saga? *Wicked Mistress Yale, The Parting Glass*, is due for publication on 1st May next year, 2020.

What challenges have you found with writing historical fiction?

At the tender age of fourteen I found a new hero – well, heroine. An author called Rosemary Sutcliff. I've read every one of her many, many novels but never found one better than her *Sword at Sunset*. It's a wonderful imagining of what the “real” story of King Arthur may have been in mid-Sixth Century post-Roman Britain. I still love it dearly, even though I now doubt whether “Arthur” ever existed as anything but a purely mythical figure. And yes, I can hear the gasps of horror all this way across the Atlantic. But I still wanted to try my own hand at recreating that “lost century” in British history. Most historians now agree that we only **know** four things about Sixth Century Britain. So my fifth novel, *The Song-Sayer's Lament*, was nothing **but** a challenge from start to finish. Theoretically it should be easy to write a story set in a period about which we know virtually nothing – but believe me that's not the case.

And before that I'd chosen to write about another era that's always fascinated me, the Napoleonic period and the Battle of Waterloo. Just to make this really difficult I decided to tell *The Last Campaign of Marianne Tambour* from a French perspective and, *merde*, from the viewpoint of two French women based on characters who actually fought on the battlefield. As you'll have gathered, I write quite a lot from a female perspective and, in a way, that helps me deal with some of the bigger challenges in writing this genre – getting the balance right between historical realism and readability; reconstructing historical settings in a way that remains interesting; and, in truth, keeping a tight rein on battle scenes so that they only serve to further the story rather than simply becoming gratuitous boys' own bloodbaths.

And finally, what's next?

Jack Telford rides again! Those two novels I mentioned set in Spain actually take place in the final months of the Spanish Civil War. Again, I wanted to bring this largely forgotten episode in history back to life. After all, this conflict in Spain from 1936 until 1939 was actually the first chapter of what would become the Second World War. Thousands of Americans volunteered to fight in Spain against the rising Nazi threat four years before Pearl Harbour and I personally knew many folk from both Britain and Spain who'd been involved too. And yes, there are lots of "stranger than fiction" aspects to the era. But the novels aren't war stories as such. My character Jack Telford is a foreign correspondent covering the conflict for a real-life English Sunday newspaper and they're actually thrillers, lots of espionage, plus a few murders – and really about Jack's development as a person. For Spanish-speakers, the second of those two is published as *Hasta Que Caiga el Telón (Until the Curtain Falls)* and there's a later novella, *The Lisbon Labyrinth*, which sees Jack almost on the point of his own retirement, set in Portugal during the turmoil of 1974. Jack's also featured in a couple of short stories but I've promised to complete his history in a final Telford novel, about his part in the Liberation of Paris in 1944.

Thanks again for the chat, Trisha, and if anybody wants to find out more about the books here's my website address: <http://www.davidebsworth.com>. There's a form on there for anybody who wants to sign up for my monthly e-newsletter too – though the easiest way to do that is just by e-mailing me: davemccall@davidebsworth.org. The newsletter's completely secure and just keeps my "inner circle" up-to-date with the books and bits of news – and if you get fed up with it, it's just one click to unsubscribe. But I just love readers to keep in touch!

You can find David Ebsworth's books here:

[*The Doubtful Diaries of Wicked Mistress Yale*](#)

[*The Assassin's Mark*](#)

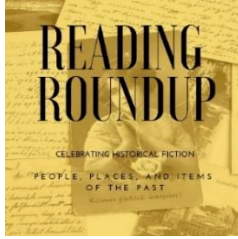
[*The Last Campaign of Marianne Tambour*](#)

You can find David Ebsworth here:

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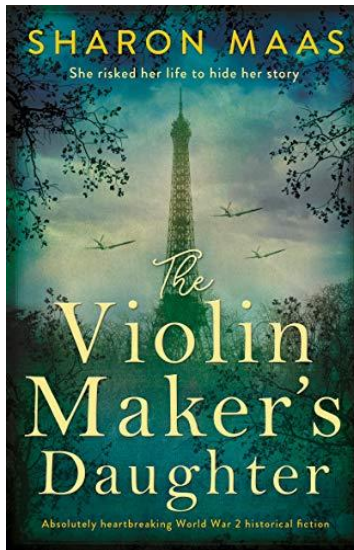
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The 1940s

The Violin Maker's Daughter

Sharon Maas



When the Nazis march onto the cobbled streets of Colmar on November 1st 1940, Josef, a Jewish violin maker, gathers his wife and daughters closely to him and tells them everything will be alright.

But one year later, three sharp knocks on the door at midnight turn his seventeen year old daughter Sarah's world upside down. As the oldest child, Sarah must be the first to leave her family, to make her escape in a perilous journey across France via Paris to Poitiers. And she must hide who she is and take a new name for her own safety. For now, bilingual Sarah is no longer a French Jew but a German girl.

As she bids farewell to her beloved father and family, Sarah has hope, against all odds, that she will see them again when the war is over. But, travelling through the mountains she finds herself in terrible danger and meets Ralf, a German deserter, who risks his own life to save her.

Ralf and Sarah continue their journey together, keeping their identities secret at all cost. But when Ralf is captured, will Sarah pay the ultimate price for sharing who she really is?

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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