



Vol. 1, No. 35, November 29, 2019

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From the Editor

It's Friday, time for our weekly Pages of the Past. No Black Friday here, I'm sorry. Nope. Not a single sale or deal too good to pass up. Only a few pages and words celebrating writing, historical fiction, and people and places of the past.

Today we have a special guest with us, Samuel Clemens, or more commonly known as Mark Twain. Tomorrow, November 30th is his birthday and in celebration of that event, he decided to grace us with a few words about writing.

We're scheduled with guest authors for the end of the year, but our spots for 2020 are open. If you'd like to be a spotlighted guest author, or if you know someone who may be interested, drop me an email. texastrishafaye@yahoo.com

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

Either/Or

In writing, but perhaps more so in historical fiction, there are a myriad of details, facts, and decisions that need to be balanced. What to include? What to leave out? When is research too little, and when is it too much? Do we write the story of a person that existed in real life, or create a totally fictional character? Here are a few thoughts from other historical fiction authors about walking the tightrope between Either/Or.

What to toss – What to keep?

2. Once the subject has been decided, I have to then determine which facts to use.

A life consists of hundreds of individual stories; it's my job to pick the two or three (at most) that will make a good narrative for a novel, a compelling story. A novel cannot explore everything about a life. That's what a biography or history does. But a novel has to entertain; it has to have a driving narrative. So when I'm reading about a potential subject, that's what I'm looking for: the one story that leaps out from all the others. With *The Aviator's Wife*, that story was the Lindberghs' marriage. I had to concentrate on that, which meant that parts of their lives that did not shed light on it or that were redundant got left out of the novel. It's like trimming a tree; I have to prune out some of the facts and events that—while interesting—don't move that narrative forward.

<https://www.writersdigest.com/online-editor/blurred-lines-writing-historical-fiction-from-fact>

Real Person – Or Fictional Person?

1. Get Real (Maybe)

I should point out from the start that *Pilgrimage* is not based on a real person or real events, which puts it in the minority of historical films out there. Don't get me wrong: Writing about real-life characters carries many obvious advantages. There's the instant brand recognition that might snare an unwary producer's ear ("Well, I don't know if I'm interested in a 15th-century French farmer's daughter who has a religious epiphany... Wait, you say her name is Joan of Arc?!") and the simple fact that half the work is already done for you ("She's born, leads an army against the English and is burnt at the stake. Done!"). So, all you have to do is fill in the bits in-between...

The trouble is that the lives of real people (even famous ones) rarely fit snugly into the confines of a hundred-page screenplay. Even if you do decide go the Lincoln or Steve Jobs route, (focusing on a small segment of their life to better illustrate the whole) you're going to find yourself combining characters and fudging dates in order to make the narrative flow a little better. Perhaps you'll need to invent a dilemma in order to justify a controversial decision. Or, maybe you'll need to take a radical new angle on the subject matter in order to keep the producer's attention ("So here's the twist... What if Joan is actually... John?!")... and maybe, just maybe, the whole thing will work.

<https://www.moviemaker.com/archives/moviemaking/screenwriting/seven-keys-to-writing-historical-fiction-pilgrimage/>

History – Or Story?

Writing historical fiction - history or story?

Once you've done all that research, it will be tempting to show off everything you know. But remember you're writing a historical novel, not a history book. Your reader is there for the story. Use only the details that belong in that story or that your reader needs to understand it. So why bother with all that research? First of all, so that you can fully imagine the world of the story and choose the right details to show the reader. And second, so that you can avoid making mistakes.

Even though what you're writing is a novel and mostly made up, a historical mistake can be disastrous. Have you ever read a book or seen a movie where you noticed a big logical or factual mistake? Once you notice a screw-up, it's often hard to pay attention to anything else. You can lose your trust in the author or the film's creator. This kind of trust is called suspension of disbelief. It means that the reader or the viewer knows that what he's reading/seeing is only imaginary, but he decides to "pretend" it's true for the moment. It's a lot more fun to read a novel if you pretend that what's happening in it is real. But any kind of mistake in the novel interrupts this make-believe. It takes the reader out of her imagination and brings out the logical part of her minds instead, which is irritated by error.

That's why it's essential to get the facts right in your novel. Then your readers can sit back and enjoy the story, an imaginary journey to another place and time.

<https://www.creative-writing-now.com/writing-historical-fiction.html>

Do we need the details – Or Not?

On the other hand, there are the million details. And it was in the million details that I struggled with an absence of information. For example, what wage would a 1902 Ladino peasant make working on a small farm for a relatively fair employer? Well, first of all, a Ladino is a peculiar class in Guatemala, defined as a Maya who has cast off indigenous dress and customs for Hispanic ones. He would make more than a Mayan man in Mayan dress, but less than a worker of Spanish descent. But he may or may not make less than a Mestizo (someone of mixed blood) as well. I lost myself in the library, scoured academic papers online, pestered PhDs, and eventually finagled the email address of a labor historian who would probably know. But after I wrote the email, I reread it and realized that I sounded insane! I stepped back. What was the point of having this answer? It didn't affect the narrative. I knew the Ladino worker wouldn't make much. I realized that I had become obsessed with this question for a line of dialogue that could easily, so easily, be made more generic.

<https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/tip-sheet/article/69756-the-impossible-task-of-writing-historical-fiction.html>

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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.





**Here's the link to subscribe to Pages of the Past newsletter.
It's free. You'll only get the newsletter, nothing else.
[*Get Pages of the Past delivered to your inbox every Friday!*](#)**

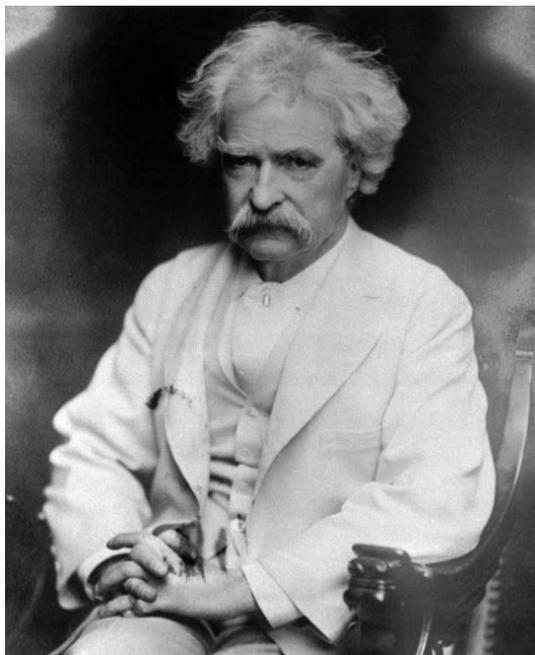
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Pages of the Past

CELEBRATING
HISTORICAL FICTION

Joining us for our author spotlight today is a celebrated and beloved writer – Samuel Clemons, more commonly known by the name ‘Mark Twain.’ After being laid to rest almost 110 years ago, he’s made the rare trip forward in time to chat with Pages of the Past.



Hello, Mr. Clemons. Or would you prefer to be called by your well-known pen name, Mark Twain?

You may call me anything you’d like. The money is good with whatever name you use. Oh wait, you aren’t paying me anything – and I suppose I can’t use it where I reside now anyway. Although I must say, you use the irascible phrase ‘pen name’, while I myself prefer the more elegant *nom de plume*, or *nom de guerre*, thank you very much.

You obviously are in favor of using a pen name, or *nom de plume*, as you prefer. What are your thoughts about writing under different aliases?

Seeing as how I’ve written under several different names, it would seem that I am in favor of the practice. Mark Twain has become the most famous name I’ve been known to write under. But I’ve also written as ‘Josh’ – as in just joshing, ‘Thomas Jefferson Snodgrass’, or ‘John Snook’ – as in ‘to snooker’.

How is it that you came up with the name Mark Twain?

(Ahem – cough – shuffling of feet) As to that little escapade. It appears that I’ve been called out on this by an [astute researcher in years most recent](#). I’ve more than once reported that:

“Mark Twain” was the *nom de plume* of one Captain Isaiah Sellers, who used to write river news over it for the New Orleans *Picayune*, he died in 1863 and as he could no longer need

that signature, I laid violent hands upon it without asking permission of the proprietor's remains. That is the history of the *nom de plume* I bear.

I've also used the story that ties into my early years as a riverboat pilot on the Mississippi River.

I believe I've heard some of those tales repeated. Are you saying that they're not true?

(Cough – snuffle – snort – more shuffling of feet) Well...there may be a bit of a discrepancy with those stories. It appears that with further research, people have discovered that Captain Isaiah Sellers apparently always signed his river reports I. Sellers.

Now, it's true that the phrase 'Mark, twain' means two fathoms deep, which is the depth needed to pilot a riverboat safely on the Mississippi. The problem is that according to your recent day research, that terminology was an uncommon usage on the Mississippi, and researchers poring over my old journals and logs discovered that even in there I used the term 'mark two.'

And then there's the old story that attributes the name to when I would spend a fair amount of time in refreshment at John Piper's saloon in Virginia City...

But, ah, the power of the word in print. So many years later, this astute fellow discovered an old humor piece in *Vanity Fair* – not the publication that's published now. There was a sketch in a burlesque titled "The North Star" reporting on the farcical meeting of three Charleston mariners who wished to adopt a resolution "abolishing the use of the magnetic needle, because of its constancy to the north." The characters were named "Mr. Pine Knott", "Lee Scupper", and "Mark Twain." He reported that this little sketch came out two full years before I first used Mark Twain.

But, as you authors know, it's all in the story and in the marketing of yourself, is it not?

Now I'm really getting confused about what name to call you. But one thing that can't be in debate is the popularity of your books over the past one hundred plus years. You're probably most known for *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. What do you-

Don't forget *Life on the Mississippi*. Personally, that's one of my own favorites. Not my very favorite, but possibly the runner up.

No, we wouldn't want to forget *Life on the Mississippi*. What other writing have you done?

Do you have enough space in this little rag you call a newsletter? Why, if I listed all that I wrote over my many years, you would need page upon page of paper. Besides those books, there was *The Prince and the Pauper*, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, *The Innocents Abroad*, *The New Pilgrim's Progress*, *The gilded Age: A Tale of Today*, and so many more.

But of all my writing, the work I am most proud of is *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*. I dedicated that to my wife, Olivia, the love of my life.

Besides those volumes were countless articles for many different newspapers, too many to name.

And there was the short life of being a publisher, publishing the memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant, entitled oddly enough, *Memoirs*, and a biography of Pope Leo XIII.

I've never heard of Grant's memoir or Pope Leo's biography. Did you publish those?

Thankfully that business venture was short-lived. I lost so much money through this brief escapade into the other side of the publishing business. Our fledgling publishing house, Charles L. Webster & Company, was co-owned by myself and my nephew by marriage, Charles L. Webster. We first published *Memoirs*, by President Ulysses S. Grant, which was a successful run. But the biography – arghhh – we lost our shirts on that one. Fewer than 200 copies were sold.

With all of the writing you've done, which has lasted the test of time, and your publishing experience too, what advice would you share with the writers of today?

'Tis this be an easy chore. Advice flows from my lips freely. Sometimes whether asked for or not. Here are a few of my favorite pieces of writing wisdom.

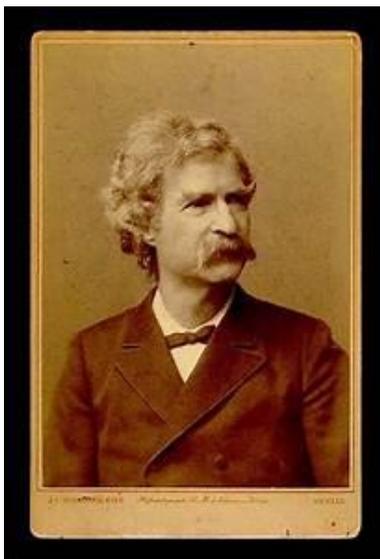
- “You need not expect to get your book right the first time. Go to work and revamp or rewrite it. God only exhibits his thunder and lightning at intervals, and so they always command attention. These are God’s adjectives. You thunder and lightning too much; the reader ceases to get under the bed, by and by.”
- “The more you explain it, the more I don’t understand it.”
- “Don’t say the old lady screamed. Bring her on and let her scream.”
- “The test of any good fiction is that you should care something for the characters; the good to succeed, the bad to fail. The trouble with most fiction is that you want them all to land in hell together, as quickly as possible.”
- “Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great make you feel that you, too, can become great.”
- “Substitute ‘damn’ every time you’re inclined to write ‘very’; your editor will delete it and the writing will be just as it should be.”
- “As to the Adjective: when in doubt, strike it out.”
- “I conceive that the right way to write a story for boys is to write so that it will not only interest boys but strongly interest any man who has ever been a boy. That immensely enlarges the audience.”
- “To get the right word in the right place is a rare achievement. To condense the diffused light of a page of thought into the luminous flash of a single sentence, is worthy to rank as a prize composition just by itself. Anybody can have ideas—the difficulty is to express them without squandering a quire of paper on an idea that ought to be reduced to one glittering paragraph.”
- “The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug.”
- “Truth is stranger than fiction, but it is because fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities—truth isn’t.”
- “We write frankly and fearlessly, but then we “modify” before we print.”
- “Write without pay until someone offers pay. If nobody offers within three years, the candidate may look upon this as a sign that sawing wood is what he was intended for.”

To sum it all up, as I once wrote to my student, D.W. Bowser:

"I notice that you use plain, simple language, short words and brief sentences. That is the way to write English—it is the modern way and the best way. Stick to it; don't let fluff and flowers and verbosity creep in. When you catch an adjective, kill it. No, I don't mean utterly, but kill

most of them—then the rest will be valuable. They weaken when they are close together. They give strength when they are wide apart. An adjective habit, or a wordy, diffuse, flowery habit, once fastened upon a person, is as hard to get rid of as any other vice."

Thank you for joining us today, Mr. Clemens. I just noticed that tomorrow, November 30th, is your birthday. I have a feeling that in celebration of your birthday and your long career as an author, we will be pulling out some of our old favorites and re-reading them in your honor.



**Samuel Langhorne Clemens
November 30, 1835 – April 21, 1910**

Need help with background research in writing your historical novel?

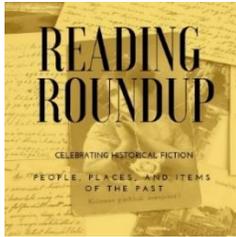
I have 18 books and many articles in print on subjects varying from 17th Century life, Salem Witch Trials, pirates, slavery and the Underground Railroad, labor history, and women, to the Civil War and Japan. I just completed researching the 1919 Flu Epidemic for Smithsonian Channel's 'Hidden History'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

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

Contact Juliet Haines Mofford at jmofford1@yahoo.com

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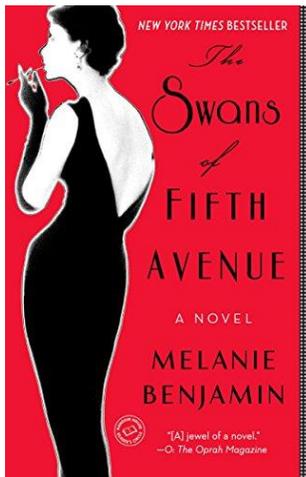
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The 1950s

The Swans of Fifth Avenue

Melanie Benjamin



Of all the glamorous stars of New York high society, none blazes brighter than Babe Paley. Her flawless face regularly graces the pages of *Vogue*, and she is celebrated and adored for her ineffable style and exquisite taste, especially among her friends—the alluring socialite Swans Slim Keith, C. Z. Guest, Gloria Guinness, and Pamela Churchill. By all appearances, Babe has it all: money, beauty, glamour, jewels, influential friends, a prestigious husband, and gorgeous homes. But beneath this elegantly composed exterior dwells a passionate woman—a woman desperately longing for true love and connection.

Enter Truman Capote. This diminutive golden-haired genius with a larger-than-life personality explodes onto the scene, setting Babe and her circle of Swans aflutter. Through Babe, Truman gains an unlikely entrée into the enviable lives of Manhattan's elite, along with unparalleled access to the scandal and gossip of Babe's powerful circle. Sure of the loyalty of the man

she calls "True Heart," Babe never imagines the destruction Truman will leave in his wake. But once a storyteller, always a storyteller—even when the stories aren't his to tell.

Truman's fame is at its peak when such notable celebrities as Frank and Mia Sinatra, Lauren Bacall, and Rose Kennedy converge on his glittering Black and White Ball. But all too soon, he'll ignite a literary scandal whose repercussions echo through the years. *The Swans of Fifth Avenue* will seduce and startle readers as it opens the door onto one of America's most sumptuous eras.

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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