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In this issue:

- Psychedelic Sixties
- Author Spotlight: Caleb Pirtle III
- Reading Roundup: Books from the 1700s and before

From the Editor

Growing up in southern California, the month of June brought us many days of what we called 'June gloom'. But here in Texas, no dreary, gloomy June days here. Bright and sunny and we're already in hot summer days with the AC going every day. Which means the steamy hot afternoons are perfect for staying inside and catching up with reading. Which is a good thing, because every day I discover more delightful authors, keeping my bookshelves and my TBR list chock full.

About today's featured author, all I can say is that East Texas's loss is North Texas's gain. When husband and wife authors, Caleb and Linda Pirtle, moved from East to North Texas, I had the pleasure of meeting them and finding out about their writing. Both are top-notch authors with magnificent books to their credit. Linda has a terrific mystery series. If you like mysteries, you can [check out her books here](#). But today we're going to be talking to Caleb about a few of his books from the past. Keep reading to find out more.

Stay tuned for future issues –In the weeks ahead we have author interviews scheduled with DK Marley, Anne Louise Bannon, Gini Grossenbacher, Pamela Nowak, Joyce E.S. Pyka, and more!

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Psychedelic Sixties



It seems odd to classify the decade of the 1960s as an era in historical fiction. After all, I remember those days. Vaguely. I couldn't go to Woodstock that was held in upper state New York the summer of 1969. My parents wouldn't let me. Being 11 years old at the time, I still had a regimented bedtime that I had no control over.

I was ready though. I was pretty cool for those days. I had my pair of white go-go boots that I'd gotten for a birthday. And my sister, my cousins, and I could sing a mean rendition of *These Boots are Made for Walking* alongside Nancy Sinatra crooning away on our hand me down record player.

Although the 1960s don't seem like a historical era, it does fall within the realm of most definitions. Wikipedia says:

Definitions differ as to what constitutes a historical novel. On the one hand the Historical Novel Society defines the genre as works "written at least fifty years after the events described", [2] while critic Sarah Johnson delineates such novels as "set before the middle of the last [20th] century ... in which the author is writing from research rather than personal experience." [3] Then again Lynda Adamson, in her preface to the bibliographic reference work *World Historical Fiction*, states that while a "generally accepted definition" for the historical novel is a novel "about a time period at least 25 years before it was written", she also suggests that some people read novels written in the past, like those of Jane Austen (1775–1817), as if they were historical novels. [4]

The world was changing in the 1960s. Wikipedia states this about the times then:

"The Sixties", as they are known in both scholarship and popular culture, is a term used by historians, journalists, and other academics to describe the counterculture and revolution in social norms about clothing, music, drugs, dress, sexuality, formalities, and schooling; and in others to denounce the decade as one of irresponsible excess, flamboyance, and decay of social order. The decade was also labeled the Swinging Sixties because of the fall or relaxation of social taboos that occurred during this time, but also because of the emergence of a wide range of music; from a folk music revival, to the Beatles revolution, to the serious lyrics of Bob Dylan and Paul Simon. Norms of all kinds were broken down, especially in regards to civil rights and expectations the men would go off to meaningless wars.

Society was changing. Culture was changing. Music was changing. The Vietnam War and Civil Rights Movement made protests common place. (Hmmm...history *does* repeat itself, it seems we're still learning this lesson!)

The 1960s included some major events.

- In 1960, the United States presidential election produced four Kennedy-Nixon debates. They were the first presidential debates held on television.
- In 1961, President Kennedy established the Peace Corps.
- The feminist movement was reawakened.
- Civil rights became a central issue.
- Kennedy was assassinated.
- Racial segregation was outlawed in 1964.

As young people began to revolt against the conservative norms of the time, it created a counterculture that became known as hippies. In 1967 the Summer of Love took over San Francisco and in 1969 Woodstock was held in New York. (Alas, without me.)

And man walked on the moon for the first time, which I remember watching from our living room on a black and white television – with rabbit ears.

Personally, I won't be writing any historical fiction set in the 1960s. It's still much too close to home for me. But since we've been looking at different historical eras as we work our way through from A to Z, we can't forget this colorful and volatile time in our history. The Flower Power revolution still reigns strong.



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Author Spotlight: Caleb Pirtle

Today we're chatting with Caleb Pirtle, a man who knows how to tell a tale. And when these stories take place in some of my favorite eras to read, his Book Town series in the 1930s and his Ambrose Lincoln series in the 1940s, you know I had to chat with him more and introduce you to Caleb and his books. One of my favorite bits is about Eudora and how she wrestled the story away from someone else. But you'll have to keep reading to find out about this feisty lady.



Hello Caleb! Pages of the Past is honored to have you as our spotlighted author this week. You're the author of over 80 books and two teleplays - one for *The Gambler V*, starring Kenny Rogers. You have a distinguished career including writing as a journalist for the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, serving ten years as the travel editor for *Southern Living Magazine*, and being editorial director for a Dallas custom publisher for more than 25 years.

To your credit, you have a wide and varied range of books, many of them thrillers that have assassins, and murders, and bullets flying. Several others are more memoir in nature, and of course one of my favorites is *Whodunit? The Adverb Looks Guilty*, which is packed full of writing tips, advice, and stories about your writing journey.

But today we're going to look at your historical fiction and the three books in your Boom Town Saga: *Back Side of a Blue Moon*, *Bad Side of a Wicked Moon*, and the newly released *Lost Side of an Orphan's Moon*. Can you tell us a little bit about what led you to the writing of these three tales?

I grew up on the cusp of the great East Texas oil boom, living on a farm only five miles from the famous Daisy Bradford Number 3 discovery well near New London, and only five miles from the Lou Della Number One well that ushered in the oilfield around Kilgore. In fact, during my boyhood days, Kilgore had 1,100 oil derricks inside the city limits. Businessmen ripped their downtown stores in half to drill for oil and created a one-block area that was known as the World's Richest Acre. My father worked in the oil patch, and my earliest memories are stories about the boom. The rich had oil wells in their front yards. The poor lived in tents and cardboard shelters in a squalor known as Happy Hollow. Those stories, both good and bad, have been rattling around in my brain for years, and I finally decided to write a series set in a mythical East Texas town when a gambling man struck oil in the midst of the Great Depression and brought life back to a dying town. In reality, a 70-year-old, crippled man named Dad Joiner came to East Texas with \$45 in his pocket in the late '20s and promised to drill a well that all the kings of the earth would covet. He prayed with an elderly lady named Daisy Bradford, quoted poetry, and convinced her to let him drill on her land. I patterned my hero, a charming con man named Doc Bannister and a beautiful widow named Eudora Durant after Dad and Daisy, who were much too old to have any kind of a love interest in the 1930s. The books are all fiction. But within every fictional story are nuggets of truth.

As you were writing, did the books being set in the past, in the years of the Great Depression, change how you told the story compared to the other books you've written?

Most of my mysteries and noir thrillers are historical fiction. I may live in the present, but I prefer the past, which, even in times of hardship and desperation, has a certain nostalgic charm. My Boom Town novels are set in the 1930s during the Great Depression. My Ambrose Lincoln series of noir thrillers are set in the early 1940s against the backdrop of World War II in Europe. The way it was always seems to be more fascinating than the way it is. War had a real face of evil: Hitler. In America, men and women struggled and endured and persevered and survived. Life wasn't easy, but life was colorful. The past also offers a greater chance to tell a real thriller. For example, let's say my hero is being chased down a dark alley in the midst of a dark night. His gun is empty. It's raining. No streetlights in a bombed-out city. A brick wall at the back offers no escape. Now you can write suspense. In the present day, he's running down a dark alley, the bad guys are gaining ground, and all he does is pull out a cell phone and call for help. Where is the suspense? You can't have him lose his cell phone every time he's in trouble. One thing to remember, however, is that a writer does as much research writing historical fiction as he or she does writing nonfiction. It may be fiction, but the story must be authentic.

Your Boom Town Saga books are set in Ashland, a small East Texas town oil town. Can you share with us about how you decided to set the story in this time and place? Did the plot affect your decisions, or did that come later?

I simply patterned the town of Ashland after the little towns of Kilgore, Overton, and Henderson which witnessed the oil boom of the 1930s. I knew them well. I had walked their streets often. Living on a farm, we went to church in Kilgore, shopped in Overton, and went to the grocery store in Henderson. And I went to school in New London only a decade after the explosion that killed almost 300 students and teachers. I am thinking about building the next book in my Boom Town series around the explosion. My mother worked in a café in Turnertown, two miles away, and my father worked in the oilfield. They were two of the first people who arrived to try and rescue the children. So the trials, tribulations, and the triumphs of the oilfield are wounds that cut deep. I would never run out of stories to tell.

Eudora Durant sounds like a fascinating and complex woman. Can you tell us about Eudora and how she evolved to her reigning role in these two books?

When I wrote *Back Side of a Blue Moon*, it was Doc Bannister's story. He was a, smooth-talking, silver-tongued, flamboyant con man, wandering from town to town, trying to make a quick buck, charm a beautiful woman or two, and escape before anybody shot him. I love con men. During my days as police reporter for the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, I met my share of them, and they could tell some wonderful stories. I wrote the first chapter about Doc and the second chapter about Eudora. By the time I had finished the second chapter, Eudora had taken the story away from Doc, and he never got it back. From then on, the series became Eudora's series. Doc played important roles, and he was still a flim-flam man, but Eudora was strong, intelligent, resourceful, stubborn, self-reliant, independent, and the one person in town everyone trusted, even if they never knew why her abusive husband vanished and was never seen again. As the books progress, oil is found on her land, she buys the newspaper because she believes the town needs a newspaper after the publisher is arrested for murder, even defends him in court because the only lawyer in the country chooses to serve as a special prosecutor. Follow the money. She rescues a homeless child wandering lost in town and searching for his father, even discovers who killed the fancy

dancer from the Sporting House although she doesn't want to believe the truth. Doc may have the street smarts, but Eudora has the grit and gumption to make things happen.

As I read through some of your reviews for your different books, one phrase was repeated often – that you are a storyteller. In one review, they wrote:

“Pirtle does not just tell stories, he brings them to life with language that wrenches the heart and engages the mind and lingers like a yellowed tintype or a 3-D photograph viewed through a stereopticon, a photograph turning brown with age, but hauntingly vivid.”

Being a storyteller and bringing the tales and the characters to life is something we, as writers, aspire to. Do you have any tips or advice to share about how you work your own magic?

I don't tell the stories. The characters do. If you take the time to create three-dimensional characters with fascinating backstories, then all you have to do is follow them around and write down what they say and do. The key is developing deep points of view for your important characters. Those points of view – those thoughts, fears, hopes, dreams, disappointments, and failures – build characters that are as real as family. They aren't merely names on a piece of paper. As I once read, if you want the reader to laugh, you have to laugh, and if you want the reader to cry, you have to be crying by the time you finish that scene. The reader will never be afraid unless you're afraid of turning out the light because you know it's out there even if you don't yet know what “it” is. Before you can tell the story, you have to honestly believe the story the character has told you.

You've written in many other genres besides historical fiction –newspaper columns, magazine articles, screenplays, and non-fiction books. Out of all the different writing you do, do you have a favorite, and why is it your favorite?

I'm not for sure I have a favorite. I didn't realize it at the time, but each milepost in my writing life has been a building block for the novels I write. At the *Star-Telegram*, I was a police reporter who covered thefts, kidnappings, suicides, and murder. I've sat with a condemned prisoner on the night he had an appointment with the electric chair. I have interviewed hit men. I spent a lot of time with the mother of Lee Harvey Oswald, the mother of an assassin. When I served as travel editor of *Southern Living Magazine*, I thought I was writing travel. In reality, I was discovering sometimes beautiful and often foreboding locations that could be worked into novels. Screenplays gave me an opportunity to learn the art of writing dialogue. And writing nonfiction books for a custom publishing company taught me how to properly structure a book and prepare it for publication. Of all the writing I've done, I guess I prefer to write fiction, knowing up front that everything you write is fiction. Even nonfiction is based on somebody else's recollections, newspaper articles, diaries, etc. Is that what really happened? Or does someone just think that's the way it happened? I could cover a murder for the *Star-Telegram*, and the only truth was a man was dead. I could interview ten witnesses, and did many times, and they all gave different accounts of the crime. Which ones did I report? The ones that told the best story.

Although Pages of the Past is about historical fiction, most of us don't always read or write in only one genre. Of all your books, if you had to pick one (I know, how can an author choose *one* as a favorite child?) which one would it be? Can you tell us a little bit about it?

I guess *Back Side of a Blue Moon* is my favorite book because so many of my early memories are woven into the story. It is the tale of a dying town during the Great Depression when drought has wilted the cotton and burnt the corn stalks in the field. Farmers are having to leave their farms. Can't sell them. Nobody has money to buy them. Stores are shuttered. Money is as scarce as rain, and it hasn't rained for months. And into town comes a charming con man with a promise to drill for oil. Is he serious? Is he a fraud? He preaches hope in a town that has lost all hope. He surveys the country with a homemade doodlebug and wants to drill on land owned by a beautiful widow. Does he think there's oil beneath her crop rows? Or is he only interested in her beauty? Rumors say she murdered her husband? What does she have planned for him?

Thank you for joining us today, Caleb. We appreciate your time. Please leave a few links where our readers can find you and your books, and we'll go follow and friend you.



You can find Caleb's books here:

[Back Side of a Blue Moon](#)

[Secrets of the Dead](#)

[The Man Who Talks to Strangers](#)

You can find Caleb here:

Website: <https://calebandlindapirtle.com>

Twitter: @CalebPirtle

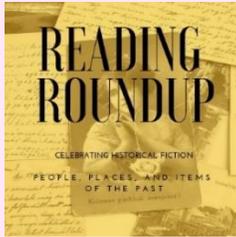
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/CalebJPirtle>

BIO: Caleb Pirtle III, a graduate of The University of Texas, became the first student at the university to win the National William Randolph Hearst Award for feature writing. His book and magazine writing have received many national and regional awards, and his coffee-table quality book, *XIT: The American Cowboy*, became the third bestselling art book of all time.

He and his wife Linda, who writes award-winning cozy mysteries, live in north Fort Worth.

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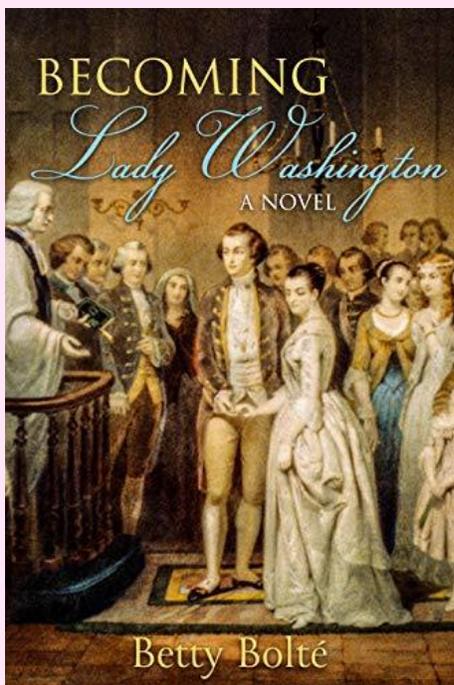
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The 1700s & Before

Becoming Lady Washington

Betty Bolte



Martha “Patsy” Custis manages an immense eighteenth-century plantation in the Virginia colony. But as a young widow she’s hard pressed to balance her business and to care for her two young children. They need a father and protector. She needs a husband and business partner...one she can trust, especially now as tensions rise between the motherland and the American colonies. Her experience and education have sustained her thus far but when her life veers in an unexpected direction, she realizes she has so much more to learn.

Colonel George Washington takes an interest in her and she’s surprised to find him so sociable and appealing. They form an instant bond and she is certain he’ll be a likeable and loving husband and father figure for her children. She envisions a quiet life at Mount Vernon, working together to provide for their extended family.

But when trouble in the form of British oppression, taxes, and royal arrogance leads to revolt and revolution, George must choose between duty to country and Martha. Compelled to take matters into her own hands, Martha must decide whether to remain where she belongs or go with her husband... no matter what the dangerous future may hold.

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