



Pages of the Past

CELEBRATING
HISTORICAL FICTION

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From the Editor

Writing historical fiction. Research. Which is my true love? Do I write historical fiction to justify the countless research hours? Or do I research to flesh out the stories that grow in my mind without any prompting? I think the answer is much like the proverbial question – which came first – the chicken or the egg?

As much research as I've done, and as much as I love it, earlier this week I ran across a blog post of an author that has me topped.

Carole Estby Dagg, is the author of *The Year We Were Famous*, based on the true story of her aunt, Clara Estby, and her suffragist mother, Helga, who walked 4,000 miles from their farm in Mica Creek, Washington, to New York City in 1896.

On a guest blog post, she writes:

*"For each book, I start with background reading to familiarize myself with the period, speech patterns, and interests of people of the time. For **The Year We Were Famous**, about Clara and Helga Estby's walk across the country in 1896, I read about six million words of biographies of people my main characters met, diaries of people similar to my characters, popular books—including dime novels—of the time, women's magazines of the 1890's and histories and geographies of places they passed through. As I began to write, I researched the details I need for each scene, such as the elevation of the pass through the Blue Mountains, the history of Underwood typewriters, frontier treatments for blisters, or the eating habits of cougars. I studied old railroad maps to work out a plausible day-by-day itinerary for the whole 232-day trek and scrolled through miles of microfilms of newspapers which chronicled their walk...*

...Trying to imagine what it would have been like to walk across the country, I drove part of the route my characters took, taking notes and poking in at little history museums along the way. Further getting into character, I found patterns for clothing of the 1890's and sewed a Gibson Girl shirtwaist and Victorian under-drawers, right down the three rows of pin-tucks on the ruffles.

I walked a mile in reproduction Victorian shoes, and prowled antique stores to find items such as a curling iron and match safe that were similar to the ones they carried."

Now that's research! Her research journey is fascinating. [You can read the entire post here.](#)

This week our author spotlight is on Peggy Harrison. I just finished the first of the three book series that she and co-author Jay Hosler wrote, *Rockslide*. Set many years earlier than the historical fiction I write, the knowledge of techniques used in the copper age, such as using ashes to cure hides, along with an amazing array of other tidbits, is another instance of researching impressing me.

Reading – researching – writing. What is your favorite aspect of historical fiction?

Trisha

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History vs. Historical Fiction

One comment I hear frequently when I mention writing historical fiction is, "Oh, I wouldn't like that. I don't like history."

Actually, neither do I. Although if you checked my browser and saw how many countless hours a year I spend researching different historical facts and events, you wouldn't come to that conclusion. But when I was a student, if a history class was optional, I was *not* taking it.

Some may think its splitting hairs, but while history and historical fiction are *related*, they are not the same thing. Borrowing two quotes from Cindy Vallor's site, [Thistles & Pirates](#), these sum it up better than what I can say it.

History and historical fiction are necessarily not the same things. The purpose of history is to narrate events as accurately as one can. The purpose of historical fiction is to enable a reader through the perspective of characters in the story to feel that she or he is present at the events. Such a goal obviously requires some modification of the events. -Andrew M. Greeley

History strives for reality, for what is provable, documentable. Historical fiction should strive for the story that underlies reality and thus become an imagined reality. -- David Nevin in A Note on Methods and Sources in 1812

Speaking of historical fiction, if you're interested in this genre, you'll want to check out [Thistles & Pirates](#). Vallor links to over **a hundred articles** about historical fiction. There are so many on that list that I'd like to read. I bookmarked her page so I can go back and read more articles that intrigue me. Her page is a wealth of information.

As historical fiction authors, we may be living in the past, but we're writing a story about it.

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I love synchronicity in action. A book signing at a local library two months was one of those moments. Seven local authors were invited. I already knew two of the authors. The others were new names to me. Two tables over were co-authors, Peggy Harrison and Jay Hosler. Peggy and I started talking and the more we talked, the more we found we had in common. (Well, except for the music part. On that aspect, I'm afraid we're worlds apart.)

Luckily, Peggy lives in the area. And even better, she's the director of the Keller museum, Wild Rose Heritage Center. Historical fiction and museums too? It doesn't get any better than that. Please welcome Peggy as our spotlighted author.

My foray into writing historical fiction was a complete accident. I write with a friend of 50 years who lives 5000 miles away, working on Skype. We started a writing project several years ago in an effort to spur a mutual friend to do what he kept saying he wanted to do: write. So far, we have published six books, while our friend has written not one word.

We decided to start by writing alternate paragraphs. Jay wrote the first one, long since lost, but it had something to do with a young couple hurrying along to see what had caused a loud noise. I put the couple in hide footwear, thereby hurtling them back in time to what turned out to be the copper age. We ended up with three books we call the Benchland Series: *Rockslide*, *Spirit Chamber*, and *Ring of Fire*.

A second series of books we are more than halfway into is Norm and Burny, about a dog and his boy. It takes place in modern times but has several characters who are far from modern. My favorite character comes from this series. Her name is Jo and she is a strong, fearless, Roma woman from a Gypsy camp in the England of three to four hundred years ago. Jo is able to do astoundingly magical things, and she uses her magic to protect Norm, Burny, and her daughter Dara while battling the infamous Morgana the Fey of King Arthur's time. Jo has her own unique syntax which has been fun to write.

So, we have written in two completely different historical times and we wonder what era our next books will lead us into. History, in general, is a subject that fascinates both of us. In real life, we're both classical

musicians, playing violin and viola. Since childhood, we have absorbed the history of the composers, their music, and their times as part of our classical training. We both still play professionally and teach, so we are passing that knowledge along to our students.

I have the honor to be the director of a small local museum located in a 93-year-old house in Old Town Keller: Wild Rose Heritage Center, where we are working to preserve the history of our Cross Timbers region. Our museum complex includes Old Town Station House, dedicated to collecting local train history. My husband and I owned a tearoom and antique shop, Cinnamon Sticks, for almost 20 years when the house was on Main Street in Keller. Our historical group moved the house to its present location on Bates Street in 2013.

Our books are available on Amazon, through Benchland.org, and at Wild Rose Heritage Center.

You can find Peggy and Jay here:

Website: <https://benchland.org/>

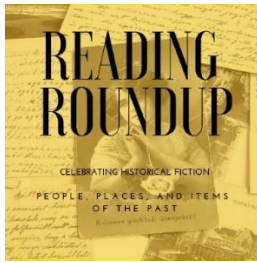
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/benchland>

The authors



Jay Hosler and Peggy Harrison are professional musicians, colleagues in orchestral and chamber music for nearly fifty years. They began writing fiction collaboratively in 2011. They have published the three-volume *Benchland* series and the first two volumes of *Norm and Burny*, a five-book series. *Revenge of the Cat* is the third volume.

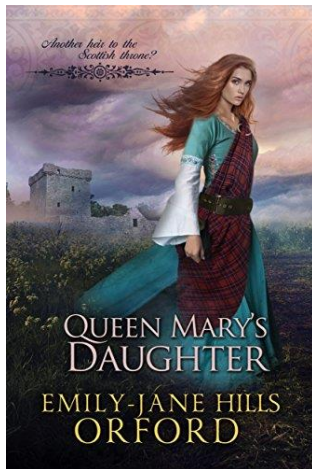
Peggy Harrison lives with her husband, Paul, in Keller, Texas; Jay Hosler lives with his wife, Mary, in Santa Cruz, California. The two couples have been friends for decades.



The 1700s and Before

Queen Mary's Daughter

Emily-Jane Hills Orford



There are so many possibilities that affect the course of history. One change, one small item overlooked, can make a world of difference, not only in a person's life but in the history and well-being of an entire nation. And then there are those multiple scenarios of what if? What if King James VI of Scotland didn't succeed in amalgamating Scotland with England? What if there had been another heir to the throne of Scotland? One who would secure its independence? Would Scotland have remained free and independent and a nation of its own well into the twenty-first century? And would Scotland, this independent version, make its own decision to join the European Union when its southern neighbor was choosing to pull away?

"Queen Mary's Daughter" presents another plausible timeline, one that incorporates both historical fact and fiction with the endless possibilities of time travel.

Ring of Fire

Peggy Harrison and Jay Hosler



The third and final volume of **The Benchland Series** contains two stories—**Warriors** and **Child of Fire**, the bookends of the Benchland Saga.

The Benchland Series covers almost 60 years of the history of the ancient Benchland colony. That history begins with **Warriors**, set years before **Rockslide**, the first volume of the series. It tells the backstory of Sigurd, one of the colony's founders, beginning with a horrifying early-morning raid on his tiny remote village, leaving him on his own at thirteen. Within months he is in warrior training in a large coastal town. Fighting barbarian raiders becomes his life.

At sixteen, Sigurd is felled by an arrow while rescuing a young girl from a raid in which her village and family perish. Barely escaping detection and sure death, the two camp in hiding while she helps him recover. Her tragic story moves him, and after he recovers he raises her as his daughter. Years later, the story's wrenching conclusion changes both

their lives, sending them together into the unknown.

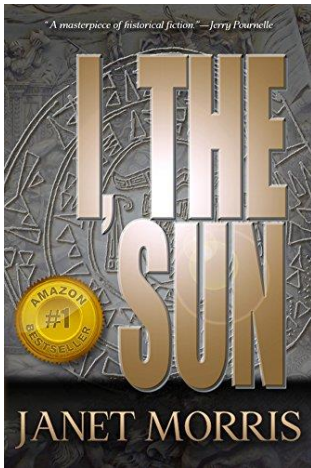
Child of Fire occurs 50 years later. Sigurd has recently come to the end of his long life as the warrior champion of the Benchland colony. His death comes at a bad time when resurgent raiders are once again a threat. The colony has expanded by building houses on the river below, where they are easily accessible to all. Defense against a large raider horde seems impossible.

In a separate plot thread, the modern scientists and cavers introduced in **Spirit Chamber** return to the Benchland after years away. Just as they discover new wall paintings showing the raider attack on the colony, misfortune strikes, and they are trapped by a psychotic killer. Their situation is desperate, with no apparent solution.

The story's title refers to Sigurd's granddaughter, a young girl of spiritual power, destined to become the colony's leader. She unites the two threads of this tale, bringing the Benchland Saga to a conclusion you won't forget.

I, The Sun

Janet Morris



Suppiluliumas I and the Amarna pharaohs: Biographical novel of the greatest Hittite king. From palace coups in the lost city of Hattusas to treachery in the Egyptian court of Tutankhamun, I, the Sun, the saga of the Hittite King Suppiluliumas, rings with authenticity and the passion of a world that existed fourteen hundred years before the birth of Christ. They called him Great King, Favorite of the Storm God, the Valiant. He conquered more than forty nations and brought fear and war to the very doorstep of Eighteenth Dynasty Egypt, but he could not conquer the one woman he truly loved.

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

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Just for fun – a photo that I wish I owned!