

THE OUTLAWS ECHO PRESENTS

*The Best of Western Culture*  
**Westerner**

SEPTEMBER 2017

**Our Tribute to  
Elvis From  
Those Who  
Knew Him Best**

**Long Live the King**

Donnie Sumner pays tribute to his friend Elvis on the anniversary of the King's death.

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**Royal Composition**

Les Reed remembers the hit he wrote for the King.

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**The Searchers on  
Heading The British Invasion**



# THE WESTERNER©

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**UPMC** **LIFE**  
**CHANGING**  
**MEDICINE**

## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



Dear Westerner© Readers:

The summer is more than half over, and we're already working on our fall schedule of publications.

On August 16, 1977, fifty years ago, we lost one of the greatest American entertainers and icons of the twentieth century. For those of us who grew up with Elvis' music, and watching his TV specials and going to his movies, he was a larger than life performer who had charisma that continued beyond his untimely death.

My wife and I visited Graceland two years ago, and I was shocked to see the number of people who were waiting to tour the mansion, grounds, and museums containing his amazing possessions.

His rise to fame in the 1950s coincided with the establishment and popularization of Rock and Roll music. Once he hit the scene, he began a steady rise to superstardom. But it wasn't without controversy.

The way the world looked at Elvis was often very different from his own view of himself. When he went on TV, cameramen were directed to film him from the waist up. His gyrations and movements seemed to evoke a sexuality for which the world wasn't prepared.

His boyish good looks and shy charm were a success with women. However, his heart was set on only one. He married Priscilla Wagner on May 1, 1967 at the Aladdin Hotel in Las Vegas.

He had one child, Lisa Marie, born February 28, 1968. His love for his family was eclipsed only by his love for his mother. She was an all-consuming part of his life until her death on August 14, 1958.

His father, Vernon, continued to work for his son and eventually outlived Elvis. They are buried together on the Graceland estate.

The strange occurrences surrounding Elvis' death have led many fans to wonder whether his body is really entombed in that quiet garden. Many have speculated as to what might have become of him, if he hadn't died

that fateful day, and others have even claimed to see him following his reported demise.

None of this can overshadow the incredible man who grew up poor and became one of the most influential recording artists and movie stars of the mid-twentieth century. He had roots in the deep south and friends in Washington, D.C. and Hollywood, CA. His life had a storybook aspect as well as the dark side that haunts many fairy tales.

He had a beautiful baritone voice, which resounded on hits like Love Me Tender, Return to Sender, Can't Help Falling in Love, and many more. His Rockabilly style blended country rock and Texas radio and the big beat. He was individualized, but also shrink-wrapped and packaged for the masses.

His movies were well ahead of their time, showcasing his talent and promoting his music. His career took a brief hiatus when he

was drafted into the army. Upon his return, he began anew, singing hit after hit and re-establishing himself as one of the great performers of the century. Elvis is enshrined in both the Rock and Roll and Country Music Hall of Fame.

We'd be remiss if we didn't remember Elvis fifty years following that day when we lost him. He was too young to die, like so many performers, and his early demise left us with many questions. We won't be able to answer them all in one magazine issue, but we thought we'd talk with a few people who knew him.

Once again, we hope you like this issue. Please write us at [dustysaddlepublishing@gmail.com](mailto:dustysaddlepublishing@gmail.com) with your comments and opinions.

BB

**INSIDE THIS EDITION OF THE WESTERNER©:**

**From the Editor**

**Inside This Edition of the Westerner**

**Letters to the Editor**

**Special Featured Article:**

**Donnie Sumner**

*Singing gospel music with some of the greatest inspirational singers in the world, working with his friend Elvis Presley – Donnie Sumner reveals the 'King' as only he knew him.*

**The Book Promotion Corner**

*with Nick Wale*

**Special Feature Article:**

**Les Reed**

*The songwriter who turned out hits for Connie Francis, Elvis Presley, Tom Jones, Engelbert, Frankie Vaughan, Max Bygraves and Timi Yuro.*

**D.G. Wyatt**

*One of the "stars" of the very successful "Six Bullet to Sundown" collections spills the beans about his latest book, his writing style and how he came to be such a success.*

**W.M. Montague**

*Meet one of the most popular Western authors of today—this is W.M. Montague.*

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**'The Searchers' Very Own Mike Pender**

*As part of the British Invasion, "The Searchers" broke the American market—but what is the great Mike Pender doing these days?*

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*The magical illustration of Judy Mastrangelo*

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**Mark Baugher**

*How Western author Mark Baugher took his book "C-Bar" and turned it into a motion picture.*

**Painting with Words: An Interview with Judy Mastrangelo**

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*The Paranormal Corner*

**History Corner with Fred Staff**

*Historian Fred Staff discusses "slavery after slavery."*

**Book Insider Interview**

*Kevin Diamond discusses working on the latest Alex Cord cover and creating some of the most notable Western cover designs of the last year.*

**Review Corner with Lon Hamilton**

*The latest Western releases critiqued and reviewed by the ever-hard-to-please Lon Hamilton.*

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



I'm excited to present the latest edition of the Westerner© because it's full of my favorites. First, we'd like to thank our sponsor, UMPC, for helping us keep the Westerner© free for our readers. Next, I'd like to thank this month's great guests for taking part in this month's issue. We would be lost without you.

We've received an overwhelming amount of emails regarding articles in our past few issues. First up is the most popular topic of the past issue, Connie Francis and the fabulous interview she gave in last month's issue. I think she added a whole new spectrum of readers to our magazine. Amazing lady, and still very much a star.

Frank Ifield also seems to have made a splash. That's fantastic to see as he's still out there with his country and western show on TV, and numerous public appearances in both Australia and in the United Kingdom.

Let me just take this opportunity to say thanks! We appreciate hearing from you. If you would like to contact us, please send your thoughts and prayers to us at [dustysaddlepublishing@gmail.com](mailto:dustysaddlepublishing@gmail.com)

Dear Editor,

I love Frank Ifield. He's been my favorite since I was a mere teenager. I think he's funny and he has the kind of voice you'd like to hear anytime.

It was great that you featured him in the magazine. My granddaughter wanted to know who he was, but I just said he was like Justin Bieber when I was her age. I remember going to the record store and getting his 45. It was the first one my mother let me buy.

Thanks for the great article, and I hope that you will be having more people like Frank in your magazine. A friend told me about your magazine and I usually don't read anything but the Globe. I've read every one now and am looking forward to the next.

Thanks again for the great article.

Mrs. K. Ediths – Harlow, Essex, UK

*Thank you for your wonderful comments about the ever-talented Mr. Ifield. We are sincerely happy to have pleased you. But don't forget to check out next month's issue when we interview Charley Pride.*

Dear Editor,

What a wonderful surprise to find Frank Ifield on the cover of your latest. I ran right out and told my friends they had to read the article. You did a great job of interviewing Frank, and I was so pleased to hear about his new work.

We had his records on the console stereo every day when my dad came home from the factory. We used to dance around the flat until mum called us for dinner. I'd forgotten those days until your article.

I read your magazine every month and enjoy all of the articles and features. I've been learning to draw with Judy Mastrangelo and can't tell you the fun I have. One of my pictures is so good that my son had it framed.

Best regards,

Mrs. L. Smith – Salcombe, Devon, UK

*We're happy to have brought back such memories for you, Mrs. Smith. We were delighted to interview Mr. Ifield and were*

*happy to have received such wonderful feedback.*

Dear Editor,

Your article on Connie Francis brought back great memories for me. I used to listen to her records all the time and went to see every movie she made. She's sort of dropped out of the limelight, and it was good to see she's still around and doing well.

My boyfriend, Robert, and I went to see Where the Boys Are when it first came out. I think that was the first movie I ever saw at the drive-in. There is nothing good in any of the popular magazines, and I'm really glad that you started up the Westerner. Since it came out I've read every issue.

My husband is a real Western book fan. He loves your articles on Western authors, and I bet he reads everything you recommend. We're retired in South Carolina now and have a lot of time on our hands. It's good to reminisce about the good old days.

Thanks!

Kate K. – Sumter, SC

*Ms. Francis was a dream interview for us, and we are glad you enjoyed our interview with her. We sincerely hope you*

*are enjoying your time in Sumter, South Carolina.*

Dear Editor,

I really enjoyed last month's issue. I have now become a subscriber due to the great interview you guys did with Connie Francis! What a wonderful woman she is! I loved her then, and I love her today.

Sincerely,

Steven Brightly

*Thank you, Steven. We hope you enjoy this month's issue as much!*

Dear Editor,

Brian Poole and the Tremeloes were one of the first concerts I ever saw in Manchester. I'm really glad to see that Brian is still out there. I was very sad when he left the Tremeloes as he had the voice for singing ballads. He was a cut above then, and still is. Please feature more articles about this great man.

N. Kinnock, London

*Mr. Poole is certainly one-of-a-kind. We are so pleased you enjoyed his interview. He still has the charisma and the voice. Our interviewer said that he has a way of making you feel like you're one-on-one with him during the interview. Keep your eyes peeled for more great interviews with stars like Mr. Poole.*

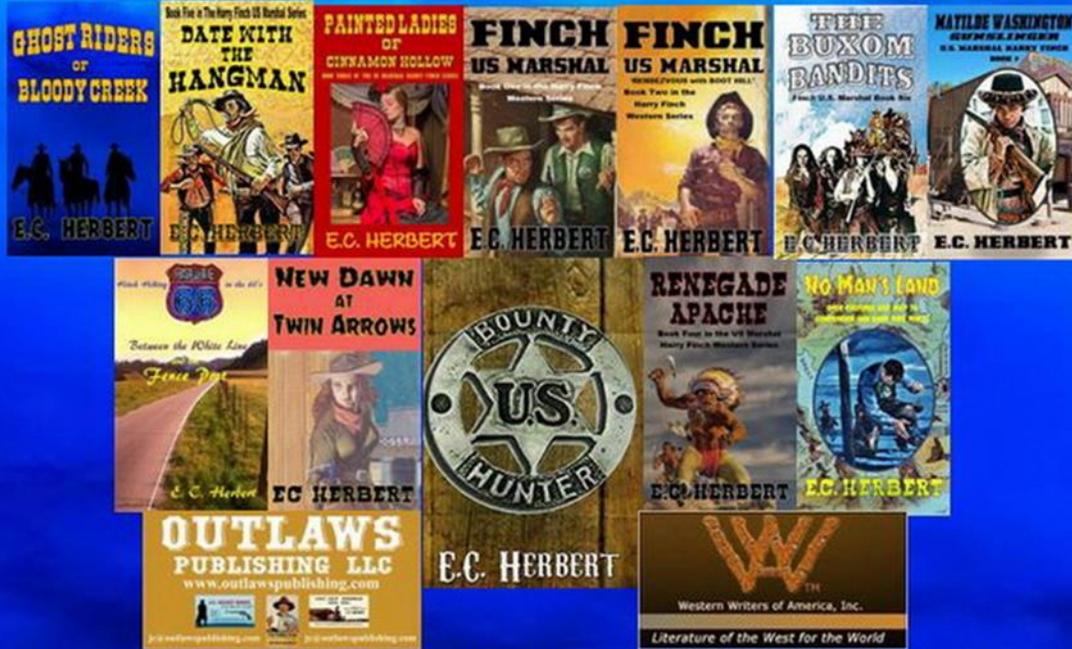
Dear Editor,

Your interview with Western author Fred Staff was very interesting. I have just finished the third book in his "Bass Reeves" trilogy, and now I understand why his writing was so good! He has lived a life many of us could only dream of. I can't wait to see what he comes up with next!

Cindy Rendom, Idaho

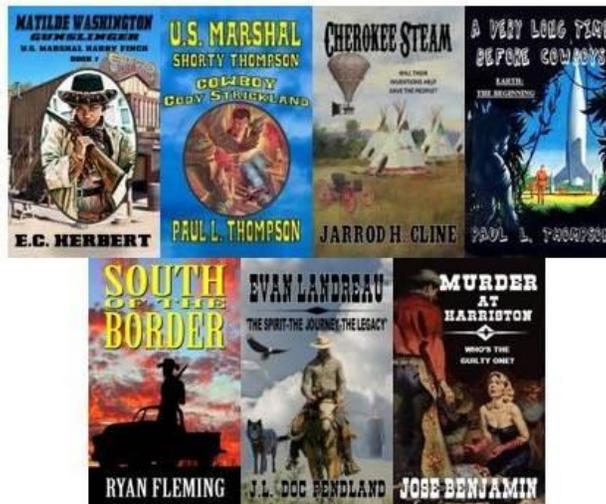
*Westerner certainly agrees with you about Mr. Staff. He is a fascinating man, and the more he writes, the more it shows. You may be interested to know that he has just released a new Western called ["Bass Reeves and Katie Quantrill."](#)*

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**COVER STAR  
INTERVIEW:  
ELVIS  
PRESLEY  
AND I:  
A REVEALING  
INTERVIEW WITH  
DONNIE SUMNER**



**Donnie Sumner, raised the son of a minister, is no newcomer to the world of Christian music. Since childhood, his favorite form of entertainment has been gospel music, with styles ranging from foot-stompin', hand-clappin' revival tunes to what has become known in today's market as contemporary sacred music.**

**Having devoted over forty years of his own life to the world of music, Donnie has carried on the tradition of others in his family who have also made their mark in this industry. Donnie is the nephew of the late J. D. Sumner, nationally**

**acclaimed as the "world's lowest bass singer." Both Donnie and J. D. were closely associated with the late Elvis Presley on both his stage appearances and his recordings.**

**Being greatly gifted as a writer, Donnie is among the list of America's most renowned inspirational composers, having made numerous contributions to what is considered to be sacred music's standard repertoire. Here is our exclusive interview with one of the King's singers.**

**\*\*\*\*\***

**How did you get into gospel music? How were you drawn into that scene?**

I've been into gospel music all my life. My daddy was a preacher, and I started singing in his church when I was six years old. J.D. Sumner was his brother, and I grew up idolizing him, and wanting to be like him. I grew up singing along with his records and then I ended up singing with him. I've been singing professionally since 1960.

**J.D. actually got a world record for being able to hit the lowest notes, right?**

Yeah and it's amazing. When he was young, his voice wasn't that low. My daddy could sing lower than him when J.D. was twenty-four. The older he got, the deeper he could sing. I have a record that I produced with him, a year before he passed away, where he sings four notes lower than the note he got the world record for. If I'm not mistaken, the note that he hit at the end of the Elvis record "Way Down" was also lower than the note he hit for the Guinness Book of World Records. I'd have to check it out to be sure.

**That's a helluva note—**

Yeah! Elvis used to say that J.D. sang so low you could smell his socks!

**(laughs) When did you first meet Elvis?**

I met Elvis for the first time in 1971 at the start of the Madison Square Garden tour.

**You were with Elvis during his record-breaking concerts at Madison Square Garden?**

Yes, sir. That's the tour that we started on. I'd been to his house a couple of times, but I'd never met him. My daddy used to preach against Elvis.

**Really?**

Oh, yeah! My daddy had record burnings at the church. He didn't want me, or the kids at the church, listening to that kind of music.



*Donnie Sumner and Elvis*

**Did you ever tell Elvis about the burnings?**

No... (laughs) There's some things you don't talk about.

**I would say Elvis is still the biggest singer of all time.**

Isn't that amazing?

**How did working with Elvis change your life?**

I noticed that the size of my crowds picked up tremendously when I started working with Elvis. On the gospel music circuit, we would sing for 5,000 people. But when I went with Elvis, it was wall-to-wall people for as far as the eye could see.

**You got signed by Elvis on a napkin, didn't you?**

I sure did! We moved in with him, and every night we sang gospel music to him.

**Was that during your time with Voice? Wasn't it a recording with Voice that someone got recorded doing a flat note at the end of a song?**

That was "Are You Sincere?" which we did in Palm Springs. Sherill [Nielson] had just had a one-hundred plug hair transplant from the back of his head to the front. He was all taped up and on pain pills. When we did that song, Elvis wanted to have Kathy Westmoreland on the end doing the closing note. But Sherill sang it, and when he hit that last note, he was a quarter of a step flat. Sherill wanted to do it over again. Elvis said, "That's the first flat note since I've been hearing you sing, and I want people to know that you can't sing as good as me—so I'm gonna put it on the record!"

**And I bet a million people have never noticed it...**

You're right. They pay no attention to it.

**You had your songs recorded by Elvis?**

Yeah! At Palm Springs, Elvis had no idea what he was going to record. The Colonel just told him he had to make a record, otherwise he would be in breach of contract. Elvis told him that if RCA wanted records from him, they would have to come down and get them. The next day a truck

rolled up, and we were recording in Elvis' living room. Elvis came in and asked what we were going to record. James Burton had been flown in overnight. It was just me playing electric piano; James played guitar. Charlie Hodge played drums on a cardboard box. Elvis started making those crazy noises he makes like "oom-pa-pa" and stuff like that. All of sudden, he wanted to record Promised Land, so we recorded it. Then he recorded some old stuff he was familiar with; but he ran out of songs, so he ended up recording a bunch of stuff I'd been singing to him in the house. I had two on there. Larry Gaitlin gave him "Help Me." He also recorded a song by Chris Christian. If I'd known he was going to record my songs, I would have written some more.

#### **A whole album?**

That's right. A whole album's worth.

#### **You wrote "Mr Songman," right?**

Yes, I did.

#### **I first heard that song recorded by Slim Whitman...**

Oh, mercy!

#### **It was certainly different.**

I've never heard it by Slim Whitman. I never knew about that one!

#### **So how did Elvis pick songs? Did he have an idea of what he wanted to do before recording?**

It all depended on his mood. If he was in a good mood, he would listen to some things that Red and Felton Jarvis brought to him. He would listen to them and make notes whether he liked or disliked the song. Usually he went into the studio and Felton would suggest songs. If Elvis liked

them, he would say, "Let's do that." For the most part, Elvis didn't have a song list before he went into the studio.

#### **He wasn't much of a prima-donna by the sound of it.**

No. People know Elvis the Super Star, but very few people understand Elvis from Tupelo. What I'm trying to say is that Elvis in real life was one of the most humble, considerate and observant friends I ever had. I always called him 'sir'—not because he demanded it, but because of what he was able to do. He was not a demanding person. On stage, he was a superstar, but that was not the Elvis that I knew. I loved that Elvis and the way he could present a song, but that was not the Elvis that I admired the most. The one I admired the most was the one who was sitting around the house eating a sandwich, getting food on his nose, and wiping it off with the back of his sleeve.

#### **The real person?**

I wish everyone who loved Elvis knew about that Elvis.

#### **How would Elvis feel about the love and devotion he is still shown today?**

I don't know what the answer to that is. The way I see Elvis—he would have appreciated the devotion, love and kindness. But he would not have gone out of his way to promote that. If it happened, it happened. If it didn't...

There are people who I have met that pray to Elvis. It's amazing. I've got a lady who writes me all the time, but she left her husband after Elvis died and somehow was legally able to marry Elvis. She writes letters to me all the time. I just tear them up. That sort of thing is not all that unusual. There really is an Elvis theology.

**It's really amazing how people have turned him into such a religious figure...**

Everyone who does that thing should have been in Vegas when he'd just finished a show and was kissing a member of the audience. A lady gave him a crown and told him he was the king. He said, "There's not but one king, and I'm not him."

**How did she take that?**

She just stood there. She wasn't offended by it. I was impressed, though.



*Elvis at a recording session with J.D. Sumner*

**So how did Donnie Sumner view Elvis Presley?**

He was the best looking, richest, most talented, most popular truck driver I'd ever met in my life.

**What kind of man is Donnie Sumner?**

I'm a multi-person. I was a person, and now I'm another person. I understand both people I've been. I used to be arrogant, career motivated. I wouldn't let anyone get in my way. One day in 1976 my life changed, and I obtained an insatiable urge to help people. I can't get enough of helping people. I don't promote my career—I just have a song to sing and a message to share in the hopes that it helps somebody.

**That's as much as anyone can hope for.**

I used to teach a class on stage performance in Texas. One of the things I always told my students was that if you're going to be a successful singer, you have to work out why you want to be a singer. Want to sing for money? Make money. Sing for pleasure? Sing for pleasure. If you want to sing to spread a message—do it. Then you have to figure out what you're going to sing. Once you know that, just do it. That's pretty much what Elvis tried to do towards the end of his career when he was in charge of what he could do. He truly wanted to make people feel better. "Hound Dog" he knew didn't make them feel better. It got their adrenaline going, but they weren't better off when he quit singing the song. When he sang "Why Me, Lord?," "Help Me," "How Great Thou Art" and "American Trilogy," there was always an emotional afterglow from the song because he had helped someone. That was where his heart was. Colonel Parker never did let Elvis do what he really wanted to do. When he got older, Elvis realized he could do anything he wanted to do.

**You can really see it in the records. He was doing different material.**

The last bubblegum rock and roll he ever did were the records we did at Stax. "Three Corn Patches," and "If You Talk In Your Sleep."

**You were with him when he recorded in the Jungle Room, right?**

No. I was strung out on drugs and tried to kill myself several times. During my third attempt, I had a traumatic spiritual awakening on Labor Day weekend 1976. I went back to Memphis. Elvis was scheduled to go to the hospital. I went to him and told him, "You know where I've been and what I've tried to do. If I'm going to live to be an old man, I have to change my life. I'd like

to break my contract, go to drug rehab and start over.” He looked at me and said, “I wish I could do that. I wish I could start over, but I can’t. I have to keep being Elvis—but you go ahead.”



*Elvis—the superstar on stage was humble, observant and considerate as a friend.*

### **He sounds like a truly great friend.**

People think that I’m an Elvis admirer, but the truth is he was a true friend to me. He was the only one who ever physically fought on my behalf. A man jumped on me in the suite in Las Vegas one night. Elvis jumped up off the couch and took on the guy. I’ve never had anyone fight for me like that before or since Elvis did it.

### **So you think Tom Parker hindered Elvis’ career?**

No. He hindered Elvis’ wishes.

### **What was Tom parker like as a person?**

Oh, Lord! Don’t get me started there.

### **He was a tough personality?**

Yeah... I never developed a friendship with the Colonel. I don’t even talk about him anymore. I live down the street from his house—five miles away.

### **You and the Stamps were recording separately from Elvis, too, weren’t you?**

When Elvis wasn’t touring, we toured on our own. We were very active in the gospel circuit.

### **The Stamps albums were almost as good as the Elvis albums. You wrote “The Things That Matter,” too, right?**

Yes, I did. “Beyond the realm of explanation, while alone in contemplation—there I found the door.” It’s like “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds.” You can make anything you want out of it. I wrote it on the bus to Kansas City one night after everyone had gone to bed. The following day, I sang it for J.D. Sumner. I asked him what he thought about it, and he said, “Duck—that would be a helluva song if it said something.” But it went to #39 on Billboard. It was nominated for a Grammy, but “A Boy Named Sue” won it. I won several awards, but I didn’t get the Grammy.

### **What are you currently working on, Donnie?**

I spend most of my time now producing gospel artists— but I’m working on a product of all the Elvis gospel songs in one package.



*Elvis holding the gold record presented to him for the recording of his record-breaking concerts at Madison Square Garden.*

### **How do you view the gospel music market at the moment?**

Gospel music has gone through three major phases since 1960. I've seen showbusiness gospel where everybody is dressed like pop singers and put on a show. Then all of a sudden it switched to a religious presentation—pseudo-religious, where everyone played religious but they weren't very religious. Then it became a mixed genre. It's hard to find a four-man quartet at the moment. It's all mixed. That seems to be the thing now. At this point, that has faded and something else is going to come on the scene—I wish I could think of what it's going to be.

**Who would you say is the greatest gospel singer of all time?**

One of two. Mahalia Jackson or Elvis Presley, depending on the flavor of music you like. Those two are the most soulful. After them, it would be Smitty Gaitlin. Everyone thinks James Blackwood, but Smitty was able to get the message out of his songs. The most notable would be one of two people: Bill Gaither or J.D. Sumner.

**Both of those guys could really sing.**

(laughs)

**How about Ernie Ford?**

I never met him—he was a friend of J. D.'s but I never met him. He was very underappreciated.

**You were with Elvis on "Bosom of Abraham," weren't you?**

I was on one a recording of that song. He did it several times. I wasn't on the recording he did for the album "He Touched Me." I always wished Elvis could have made a record with the Golden Gate Quartet. He idolized their bass singer. Elvis knew every Golden Gate recording. He knew all the parts, every inflection and rhythm on those

albums. He owned every recording of theirs. He tended to only listen to gospel recordings, anyway.

**He was addicted to them?**

He truly, truly was.

**Well, thank you for your time, Donnie. It's been a pleasure talking to you.**

You, too. Have a great evening and thank you for this wonderful interview.

## THE BOOK PROMOTION CORNER WITH NICK WALE



Western authors arrange calls with me often and start with something along these lines: “I wrote this book called \_\_\_\_\_ and nobody is buying it. Nobody buys Westerns anymore. It’s so sad.”

I have to smile. I mean, you have to smile, don’t you? It’s one of those strange “certainties” that people are so sure of—Hollywood isn’t making Westerns anymore... so they must be dead, right?

Well, that’s not true. I was talking to a well-known middle of the road musician a few days ago, who explained that record companies are losing money every day of the week. Why? Because they don’t back middle of the road music stars and make albums with them. Guys like Andre Rieu, Peter Nero and the like are not encouraged by major labels—yet their records sell in the millions to people who enjoy listening to melodic music.

That’s how the Western is enjoyed these days. Hollywood has given up on it, and major publishers are avoiding publishing them. But authors are still writing Westerns, readers are still reading Westerns, and small publishers are building huge corporations by publishing them. Just as Peter Nero still makes albums of piano

music, and Andre Rieu tours the world and has become one of the biggest record sellers and touring attractions in the world. Who needs Hollywood and Madison Avenue?

Those Western authors who promote their books have a monopoly. These are authors who can hold a dozen or more positions on the bestseller charts. The unpromoted Western isn’t found—even though readers want them very badly. The same musician told me that when he signed his first contract with a record company, they would set aside hundreds of thousands of dollars to promote new talent. I know of only three smaller book companies that will put money into promotion. I know of few major publishing companies that promote responsibly. A press release on its own is not promotion—no matter what it says.

So, my point is this: How can you judge the size of an audience who can’t see your book, yet when a little bit of effort is put into promoting a book, that same audience jumps up and grabs it with both hands? The more you promote—the more your book is seen; and the more it is bought, the more it is seen and purchased by other readers.

Look at Paul L. Thompson. He currently holds seven positions in the top one hundred. He accounts for 7% of sales in the top one hundred bestselling Westerns in America. Did he get there by magic? No. His publisher believes in promotion. I promote his books. He sells because the audience sees him. We change his keywords, we send out mailers, we put him in front of Western readers. It’s the same with Mike Hundley, Alex Cord, C. Wayne Winkle, G.P. Hutchinson, Texas John, Weldon Shaw, John D. Fie, Jr., Michael Haden, Cliff Roberts, Robert Hanlon, and a hundred other talented authors who probably account for 500,000 paid pages read of Western product each day of the week. That’s a chunk of change, and we aren’t even talking about sales yet. That’s just paid pages read on the KU program—a program most “publishers” avoid in favor of publishing on Smashwords. Yes—Smashwords.

So my next question is this: If the Western is dead, and the Western audience is dying—why are these authors doing so well? It's not that they spend hundreds of thousands on advertising. It's not that the audience is dead. It's because they all promote reasonably, responsibly, and don't give up.

Throw in all the multiple products you can put together. Audiobooks, paperbacks, box sets, and the like, and you have your own little industry growing.

It's as simple as that.

Additionally, Randall Dale, D.G. Wyatt and Clint Clay will soon be joining them at the top of the tree. In fact, I bet we will see them there very quickly. You should check them out.

Okay, maybe I'm just griping here. The joy of writing is to write—but it pains me to hear that there's no audience for Westerns. Why? Because if that audience is dead, then I'm spending a lot of time talking to dead people—and I ain't no medium. I leave that to [Andy Hopkins](#).

*If you need help or advice, just holler. You can catch me through the wonderful world of email. Yes... you can email me at [Nick@nickwale.org](mailto:Nick@nickwale.org).*

# THE HITMAKING WORLD OF COMPOSER AND PRODUCER LES REED



If you've ever heard the hits of Tom Jones, Engelbert Humperdinck, Bing Crosby, Solomon King, Frankie Vaughan, Elvis Presley, Connie Francis or a pile of other popular singers—you've heard the work of Les Reed. He's not a pop star, but he is a record producer, a composer and a man with an out-of-this-world ear for hit records. From "It's Not Unusual" through to "The Last Waltz"—you're hearing his work.

This interview covers the recording process, the promotional process and the work that goes

into making singing stars hit records. If you've ever wondered what goes on in a recording studio, you're about to find out.

What I got from this interview was that most of the great work comes by sheer chance. The reputation precedes you, but it's the chance meeting of a recording artist and a talented producer like Les, who picks the right song, the right lyricist and helps create a repertoire a performer can perform for years. But enough of me telling you—let's find out what Les has to say about all this...

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Les, it's great to meet you. I've been listening to records you've made with artists and by yourself for years. It's a pleasure to be interviewing you.

Thank you. Well, it's a pleasure to be interviewed.

**Before we get started, I wanted to ask you this: Do you ever wonder how you found the time to work with all the artists for whom you helped create success?**

I was given a list of all the artists I'd worked with since 1957. I can't believe it. It goes on for reams and reams and reams. There were names I have to think twice about. You're going right back to the late '50s. I don't know how I find the time.

**Let me start by asking you about your work with Elvis Presley. You two had a hit record together, right?**

*Sylvia.* He put it out as a single in Brazil, and it went to number one. We wrote five songs for Elvis. He did a beautiful job of "Girl of Mine" and "This is Our Dance." There were two other songs he never recorded. But there is a lovely

recording they took of the studio when he was recording our songs. Elvis told Floyd Cramer, who is one of my favorite pianists, and Elvis told him to play the piano like I played it on the demo. "Play it like Les!" What a fantastic compliment!

His publisher was forever on the phone looking for songs. Freddy Beinstock. He handled Elvis' company in the States and here, but I never met [Elvis]. It was sad, but there you go.

**Fascinating. There's an album I've been listening to for years by British singer Frankie Vaughan that you put together for him. How did that project come about?**

Oh, Frankie! Was it an album or a single?

**It was an album called "Mr. Moonlight." Do you remember that one?**

You're right! It was an album. I'd known him virtually all my life; we sort of came up in the business together. He was forever humming a song if you were around him. In the end, I said, "This is bloody stupid. I think what I've gotta do is write you a few songs." He said, "Les... I'd be more than delighted." That's how we got together. We made an album and a single. It wasn't "*Give Me The Moonlight*," which was one of his major hits, but we did quite a few together and the album was just lovely. We became inseparable friends, and he was such a lovely man. To this day, he is one of my favorites.

**He was easy to work with, then?**

There was no one easier than Frank. If everything was going his way, he just succumbed to it all. We spent hours working on that album. Me telling him how to sing. I did that quite often with artists, as I'd grown up as a singer. There were certain lines he was doing not to my satisfaction,

so I sang them to him, and he did them to perfection.

**I always thought that album had a different sound. It was almost like a Tom Jones record of the period.**

Frankie adored Tom, and I think that's the reason he wanted me to take him into the studio. The fact we had done all that work with Tom, and Frankie wanted the same kind of thing. We gave it to him, and he was very, very happy.

**I'm glad you remember that record because there isn't so much written about him anymore, and he was a tremendous talent.**

It's a shame because he was a big star and played a decent round of golf. He was a good man. I thoroughly admired him, and it was a joy to work with him.

**About Tom Jones during that period. You had a very close association with Tom Jones' manager, Gordon Mills. How did that come about?**

Yes. Gordon started off as a harmonica player, and when I was with the John Barry Seven, we did tours and that particular harmonica group was on the bill. I don't know what it was—a certain something—but we met up in a café one night and he said, "Les, I could work with you," and I said, "Ring me." That's what he did, and he said, "I've got this new boy [Tom Jones]—can you get to the Rialto in..." (I think it was St. Johns Wood, somewhere like that). There is a film of it on Facebook where Tom and I first met, which is a lovely story. When I first recorded him, we took him to Evie Taylor who was a big manager/agent, and she had a penny whistle man in the office called Des Lane. She left Gordon, Tom and I outside in the foyer, and we had to wait for half an hour while she did her business with this Des

Lane. She eventually said, "Come on in, Les." She was managing the John Barry Seven, which I was a part of. We played her the record. She didn't think it would be a hit. We took the song for Sandie Shaw to record, and she said that Sandie wouldn't record it. We walked out, and she turned down a billion dollars of talent that day for a penny whistle man. She could have had Tom, Gordon and me. It was then that Gordon and I decided Tom should release "It's Not Unusual," as we'd already made the demo.

**How did actual the recording of "It's Not Unusual" go? Was that an easy record to make?**

Well, we went to Decca and they were in love with Tom. I asked when we could get in to record it. I asked for Sunday, got it, did the arrangement, produced him with Gordon and that's how the record was made.

**Tom Jones is one heck of a talent...**

There's no one to touch him. When he first came on, Gordon told me I wouldn't like the way he was dressed. He was wearing tight black trousers, a rabbit foot around his waist, a shirt that was open to the belly button. He opened his mouth and started singing a Jerry Lee Lewis song, and I couldn't get him into the studio quick enough. First impressions, right?

**Exactly. So, how did you begin your relationship with Engelbert Humperdinck?**

Back during the John Barry Seven days, he toured with us as Gerry Dorsey. He and I became extremely good friends. He phoned one day and told me he had been given a contract from Belgium and asked me to do the record. He told me he had the song already. It was called "*Dommage, Dommage*" and I orchestrated and conducted it for him. We've written many songs for him over the years, and he's still a success

today. He's a joy. After the success of his latest album, he could certainly hit the top of the charts again.

**Gordon Mills had a really good eye for managing talent—Engelbert Humperdinck, Tom Jones, Gilbert O'Sullivan -- Solomon King?**

Solomon King? I wrote for him too (*laughs*). Gordon knew talent. We wrote a couple for Solomon. "When We Were Young" was a big one. He did very well on the Continent. A nice man; he died too early, but a lovely voice.

**I agree. Much underappreciated. So, let me ask you this. What's the process of actually making a record? How does it work technically?**

I can only tell you from my point of view, but I have something like fourteen lyric writers that I've worked with over the years. When an artist wants me to record them, I pick the lyric writer that would suit that artist best. It might be Barry Mason, Terry Dempsey, I could name the lot. Then we would meet with the artist, play them the song; in most cases they loved the song. Then it was up to me to fix keys and come home and do the arrangements, get into Decca or EMI, and literally produce them with that arrangement and a nice big orchestra. I would conduct it and play piano, as well. My agenda is quite full, if you know what I mean. The lyricist is the answer with a lot of artists. They always came up with the right lyric. You can make a mistake now and again, but in the main, they were the prime thing. Many of these artists adore good lyrics. I started writing songs when I was six years old—as time progressed, I just concentrated on the music.

**How involved are the actual record companies in the process?**

An instance is Decca with Tom. Sir Edward Lewis, who became a dear friend of both mine and my wife's, he owned Decca and he would keep me in touch with new artists, who I would write for and produce. He had a team around him who were wonderful. Once the record was made, you could rely on the best ever pushing of that record. Decca did such a good job on our recordings as did EMI. They had a lot to give once the record was made. Now and again, you'd come across a very weak promotion man who didn't last very long. They sorted the chaff out from the good. Their promotion men were terrific. Then it came from radio, TV, with people like Engelbert and Pet[ula] Clark. We had no problem featuring them on TV with their new songs. The record companies had a big part to play in the success of records.

**What does a record company, or record promotion executive, actually do to promote a record?**

They let the world know that the record is being released. Sometimes in national newspapers. They would come up with a story usually, not always very nice. Might be a divorce settlement, and then they'd mention the new record that would be coming out. They all had their own way of promoting a recording. In the main, it worked. Through the national press, who they went for first, you're talking about millions of people. They then would liaise with the publishers, for promotion on the radio, etc., etc. They did play a big part and did it well. God bless them.

**I've asked several dozen singers how a record is promoted and most of the time the answer is: "We just turn up to do the singing," so thank you for explaining how records are chosen and promoted.**

That's all the artist does normally. Just the singing. Quite honestly. When I recorded P.J. Proby, we gave him "*Delilah*" before Tom. He hated it and did such a funny voice, I couldn't put it on the album. He turned it down and it was the biggest song of ours, of all time. It's played in every football stadium in the world every week. It's become such a famous song, and he turned it down. Can you answer me why he turned it down? I can't.

**You can't win them all I guess. I wonder if he regrets that recording?**

P.J. has a helluva lot to offer. He recorded "*To Make A Big Man Cry*," and "*What's Wrong With My World?*" that we wrote for him. Then we did an album called "*Believe It or Not*," which is a lovely album. Most of the songs he did were tremendous, and we are still incredible friends.

**At that time must have been one of the premier go-to guys for recording artists?**

There were others. People like Tony Hatch and a few others. There were a group of guys who took care of artists, and we had our own thing going. We got a helluva lot of requests from abroad. I did that in a lot of cases. Connie Francis, Johnny Halliday, Timi Yuro. We made records with all of them and hits with all of them. That was absolutely lovely.

**You also helped write the final Bing Crosby hit record. What was it like working with the legendary Bing Crosby?**

I wrote a song with him called "*That's What Life Is All About*." We sent it over to Bing and he loved it but rang one day and asked if he could change a few lyrics here and there. I said not [a problem] at all. He changed two or three lines which were lovely. It opened a lot of doors for me when "*That's What Life Is All About*" became a hit, I

ended up working with Sinatra, Sammy Davis and the rest of the clan. We did many records together. I did a film with Sammy called “One More Time,” and the song we did was called “Where Do We Go from Here?” The producer was the very famous Jerry Lewis; Peter Lawford was in it. After that film, I would go to America and be invited to dinner. It was a very exciting time. Jerry Lewis was a wonderful man to spend time with. Whenever we had dinner together he would have me in stitches.

**He’s really something else. You know I had Connie Francis on here the other week—fantastic interview. Tell me what was it like working with her from your point of view?**

Sensational. I was always a great fan of Connie. I spent a good ten days out there with Connie, teaching her the songs. She was delightful. We did half the album in Los Angeles and half at my studio in London. It’s become quite a collector’s piece. People love that album. It’s one of the nicest times I’ve had in my business. She was just delightful to work with and I love her immensely. She always mentions that album, which is lovely.

**Do you remember the song “Three Good Reasons?”**

I do (*laughs*). Jeff Stevens wrote the lyric. He wrote some beautiful lyrics. We’d been partners since the late ’50s. He wrote that one. Frank Ifield did it first—then Connie did it.

**Well, thank you for this great interview—I truly appreciate you taking the time to talk with me. How does it feel looking back on your career to have been so successful?**

I’ve been lucky in my career as most of the people I’ve worked with have been very warm. They exude warmth, and it comes over in their recordings. I want to thank you for doing this. It’s

very lovely and I’m knocked out that you’re doing it. I’d love a copy when you’ve finished it. You’ll keep that promise, won’t you?

**I will.**

# SAVING THE SIXTH BULLET FOR LAST:

AN INTERVIEW WITH  
WESTERN STAR D.G.  
WYATT



*The year 2017 has been notable for a great many things—but one of the most surprising achievements was the success of “Six Bullets to Sundown.” This collection of Western short stories rocketed up the charts and became a surprise hit. Each of the authors selected for this collection had talent, but talent alone does not create success. It was the combination of six star names that helped bring that collection to masses, and this interview is with D.G. Wyatt—one of the star names that made the collection possible.*

**Thank you for agreeing to interview with Westerner, D.G!**

It’s my pleasure.

**Have you been surprised by the success of “Six Bullets to Sundown”?**

Yes, I have. It’s been an amazing experience and to see it doing so well is just so humbling—to see a project we all worked on together do so well.

**How do you write a story for a collection like that? Is it harder than writing a novel?**

Yes, it’s harder to write a story like this especially when working with such talented authors. You really have to step up your game to write at their level. However, it a great learning experience, and I’m excited to be involved in it.

**How do you fit a full story into such a short space?**

You have to think outside the box and find new ways to get your story all together to fit in the pages you’re allowed in a short story collection like this.

**Why do you think readers are so fascinated by short stories such as the ones in that collection?**

Because they’re entertaining, and each story has a different twist on it and keeps the readers wanting more.

**Where do you think your Westerns will go next?**

I’m open for anything, and I’ll write whatever catches my eye, so there no telling where my next book will go.

**What projects do you have in mind?**

I have a few in mind, but right now I’m still in the planning stage.

**Do you prefer to write short stories, or the long novels you’ve been used to writing?**

Both, actually. I enjoy both styles. Keeps me learning and challenging me to evolve into a better writer.

**Which books have influenced your writing the most?**

Westerns by Robert Hanlon, Cliff Roberts and Alex Cord. I enjoy their books very much and can’t wait to see what they come up with next.

**Why do you think the Six Bullets collections have been so successful—when other collections have failed so miserably? What's the key?**

I think the reason Six Bullets has been successful are the unique writing styles of each author. Each one brings something new to the project, and it brings the best out of the rest of us to step up and push ourselves harder to give the readers something more to make them come back for more.

**Do you recall how your interest in writing originated?**

My grandmother. She always encouraged me to do my best, and her love of the Old West really got me into Westerns.

**How do you think your writing has developed over the last few books? Have you become a better writer from all the writing you've done?**

I believe I have become a better writer, and I hope to keep learning more and being involved in as many projects as I can so I can become a better writer that readers will start to follow.

**What can we expect from you in the future?**

Look for my next Western coming in Fall 2017. It's just around the corner, folks!

**What can readers who enjoy your book do to help make it successful?**

Send me your comments and suggestions for stories or ideas you have for me at [dennisgager@yahoo.com](mailto:dennisgager@yahoo.com). I love to hear from the readers.

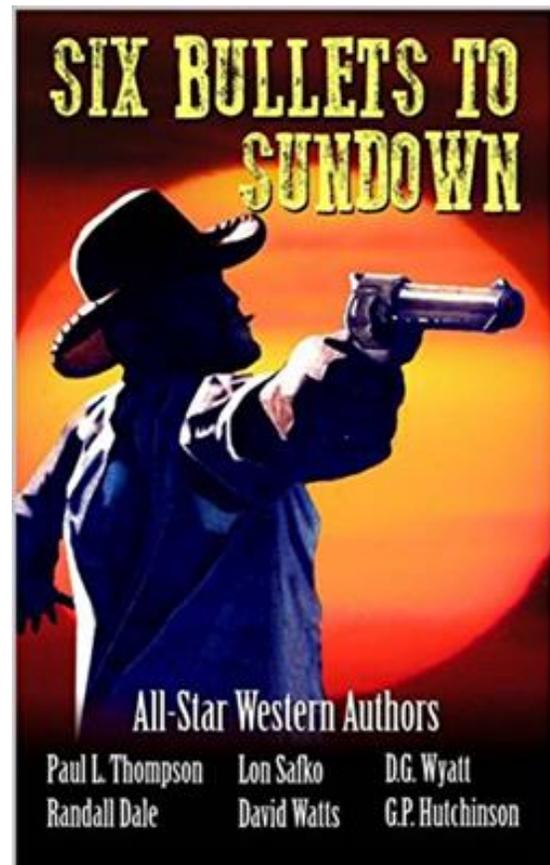
**Do you have any tips for readers or advice for other writers trying to get published?**

Yes, write from your heart, never take no for an answer, and let your imagination run wild in your

stories. You have to think big when you write a book. *Think BIG*, and you'll get a big story.

**Is there anything else you'd like to say?**

Yes. I'd like to thank all of my readers so far for reading all my books. I'd like to tell you all that I'll be working to give you the books you want in the future. I have many ideas—and I hope you will travel along with me and try some of my new literary adventures.



*"Six Bullets To Sundown" is available now from Amazon. Don't delay—get your copy [today!](#)*

# WRITING, READING AND ROPING THE OLD WEST:

AN INTERVIEW WITH  
WESTERN BESTSELLER  
W.M. MONTAGUE



*What can you really say about a writer like W.M. Montague? A writer who can turn out stories one after the other, with abounding interest and appeal. A writer who has no problems turning*

*the ideas in his head into pages of books that have been enjoyed across the Western reading world.*

*That's what this interview is about. It's about the creative process that goes into creating a book. A book that will go into stores and onto shelves and become part of someone's life. Think about it. That's what writers like W.M. Montague do. They become part of the very fabric of your living, breathing self.*

*Let's meet him.*

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**Thanks for joining me for this interview, W.M!**

It's a pleasure to take part in this. I love what this magazine represents.

**Thank you. It's going to be great having our readers learning about your books.**

Learn? Educational? Heck...

***(laughs)* Okay, you have some of the most traditional titles in the Western business—looking at your book library, you know instantly that a W.M. Montague novel is going to be a Western. Did you consciously do this?**

Yes. There's more than one kind of "AMBUSH," you know.

**Interesting. This has been on my mind for a little bit. Is there a message in your novels that you want readers to grasp?**

I think this world is missing the essence of the idea that, in spite of all the trials and tribulations, man would not make it without faith in three

things: God, one's self, and family. For therein lies true respect of others, value of lessons learned, and strength in the bonds of family, whether the one they're born into or one created by them.

**Okay, we know that you write fiction, but how much of your books is realistic?**

That's a good question since I'm sure some of it—if not most—COULD have happened. I incorporate research into my stories to get the best idea of what a real environment at that time frame would be like, or how a given real situation in a particular timeline might be played out, while trying to give the reader as much information as needed to bring it to life.

**I know as a writer you're going to draw inspiration from not only your own experiences, but from the great works of other writers. Which books have influenced your life most?**

Oh, there is such a spectrum of authors and genres that I wouldn't know where to begin.

**Interesting. Some writers see writing as a hobby. Some see it as a chore. How do you view it? As a career?**

I do! It beats the heck out of breaking one's back for someone who is, shall we say, less appreciative of one's efforts. Seriously, though, now that I've started, I beat myself up for not taking my English teacher's advice when she suggested I start writing. I find I really do enjoy writing tales that leave readers wanting more of what I write. I would like to say that I am ever-grateful for my fans' enthusiasm and their support for my works.

**If you had to do it all over again, would you change anything in your latest book?**

I really don't think so. "AMBUSH" is not your usual run-of-the-mill type of ambush; it's about a different kind of "AMBUSH." Don't fret none, now. There's still plenty goin' on in there with those twin brothers.

**Do you recall how your interest in writing originated?**

To be honest, I had never shown any of my writing to anyone throughout the years. One day, a friend, and author himself, was visiting and noticed some of my manuscripts. When asked if I had any more, I said yes and showed a few more. My friend asked why hadn't I finished any of them and if I had ever thought of publishing any. I said I didn't think anyone would be interested in my drivel. Then my friend frowned at me and snapped, "Yes, they would. Now finish the damn thing!" Thus began my journey into "The World of the Author and His Imagination, Painted in Book Form."

**What is your overall opinion of the publishing industry?**

Let's just say I'm glad I have a publicist.

**Can you share a little of your current work with us?**

I am working on a couple of things. You know, knocking around ideas, seeing if they might develop further. I have some works that are longer and more involved so their progress has been slow. But I also have in mind soon to put to pen a follow-up story for either "THE CACTUS ROSE STORIES," the "PADRE SAGAS," or "STAGECOACH TALES." I've even been asked if my latest "AMBUSH" (which is currently part of "THE CACTUS ROSE STORIES") could become a series of its own, an idea that may come about. I guess we'll just have to see.

**Do you ever get tired of looking at words?**

That usually only happens when I get on a writing binge for hours at a time. Then they begin to cross over into one another and blur.

**Who designed the covers?**

A very talented young man by the name of Kevin Diamond. An extremely talented gentleman with an eye for the client's ideas.

**What was the hardest part of writing your book?**

The mechanics of getting it published. I'm not too good at that. That's why I have you, Nick. (he laughs)

**Did you learn anything from writing your book, and what was it?**

Auto-correct isn't always a good thing. No, really. Actually, it's that I'm still learning and hope to continue doing so.

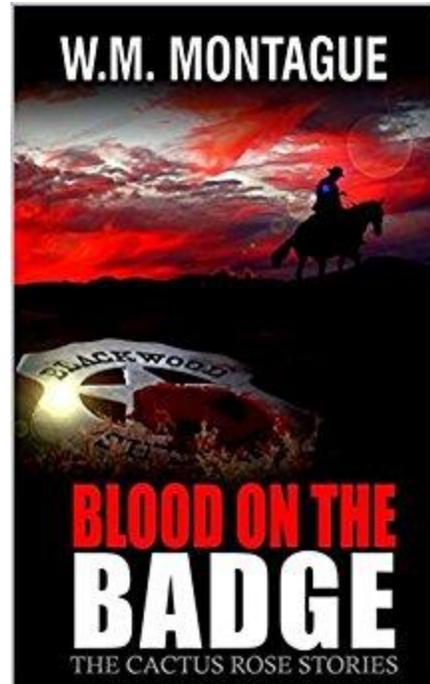
**Do you have any advice for other writers?**

I don't think I'm far enough up the food chain in this business to qualify me giving advice. As I said, I'm still learning.

**Do you have anything specific that you want to say to your readers?**

Yes, thank you. To all my wonderful friends, fans, readers and future readers of my works, Thank You for enjoying our journey through this life we share through the joy of the written word, knitted into tales of flight and fancy. By the grace of God, I pray we each be blessed by the crossing of our paths.

Thank you, for inviting me to share a bit of time to chat. It was an honor.



*It's **NEW**, it's wild and it's **WESTERN**! Catch your copy of "[Blood on the Badge](#)" from W.M. Montague [today](#)!*

# HOW THE SEARCHERS BROKE THE UNITED STATES:

## AN INTERVIEW WITH MIKE PENDER



*The original band: Tony, John, Chris and Mike (with TWA bag) arriving in America in 1964.*

When the British invasion took place, there were a multitude of groups that flooded the American market—like a musical D-Day. The Beatles took the beaches, Herman's Hermits took the grassy heartland, and The Searchers took the cities. For the first time, British music could be heard on radios across America, and in this month's issue of the *Westerner*, we are

going to present an interview with one of the pioneers of that movement.

From "Sweets For My Sweet" to "Don't Throw Your Love Away," these guys ruled the charts—and Mike Pender, along with his group "Mike Pender's Searchers," now rule theatres across the world. But what was it like working in Liverpool during those early days? Would you like to know what really went on in the Cavern Club? How about the riotous rock and roll shows in Hamburg? How did they get that "Needles and Pins" sound for their records? What really went on to make "The Searchers" such a startling success?

Let's find out—this interview with Mike Pender, founding member of "The Searchers," will be educational.... I promise.

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Thank you for agreeing to this interview with *Westerner* magazine—it's a pleasure to meet you.

The pleasure is all mine. Thank you for asking me to be involved.

**So where did it all begin, Mike? How did you take a band from zero to the top in just a few years?**

You have to go back to 1956-57. I had my first job on the docks at Liverpool as an office boy for one of the big shipping companies, of which there were many. In the mid-50's in Bootle, which is a suburb of Liverpool, a lot of people worked on the docks. I was told that during the war Bootle was really bombed to hell. I was born in 1941, so I would have been around but didn't remember

anything. I went to school in Bootle, played football, make the school football team. I was captain of the team. They were the best young years of my life. Especially the later years when I went to the senior school. I played for the Bootle team. One of my claims to fame was playing football at Anfield. I still have my loser's medal from that match. Things like that still mean a lot to me.

**Before you were hooked by the music business, it was football for you? If you'd stuck at the football, you could have become a leading player?**

My coach at that time said, "Prendergast," (which is my real name), "you've got it! You can do it! I can see you making the grade and becoming a professional footballer!" But as soon as I heard Elvis Presley sing "Heartbreak Hotel," football went out of the window and it was music and guitars from me.

**Now there's a question. How did you get your first guitar?**

I got my first acoustic guitar, which were called in those days Spanish guitars, by swapping my American comic collection with a guy. Back in those days kids in my area would always collect something. I liked "Superman," "Captain Marvel," but my favorite was "Tales From The Crypt." I had a great collection, which I swapped for a Spanish guitar when I was sixteen years old. I would sit in my mother's parlour every night trying to play the thing, throwing it away when I struggled—but I taught myself how to play.

**Something I've always wondered-- Where did the name "The Searchers" even come from?**

When I was sixteen-and-a-half, I got together with a couple of other guys and we went to see "The Searchers." I loved Westerns, and we sat in

the stalls looking up at John Wayne and Jeffrey Hunter spending the whole movie looking for Natalie Wood. We left the movie, and on the way home I suggested we call the band "The Searchers." A couple of weeks later I wondered if that was too corny—but it was such a good name. People still tell me that I picked a good name—that's where it started. Myself and three other guys started a band called "The Searchers."

**So, what were those early days like as a part of The Searchers?**

We started by just playing instrumentals. None of us could really sing. We had Joe Kennedy on drums, Joe West on bass, John McNally on guitar, myself on lead guitar. We played Duane Eddy type instrumentals and sang a few songs of the day (not very well). My favorite instrumental was Arthur Smith's "Guitar Boogie." We went on for a couple of months, then one night at one of the gigs we had our amplifier stolen. Joe West came from a well-off family, [and he] purchased a brand-new amplifier for the group. The next day Joe called down to my house and told me that the group was finished because his parents were upset that the amplifier was stolen. So, the first Searchers came to an end. I had no idea what I was going to do next. John McNally lived a quarter of a mile away from my house, and I learned he was in hospital, so I was on my own.

**On your own without a group—what did you do next?**

In 1958, while I was looking to meet other people who played music, I got a ticket to see Buddy Holly and the Crickets on March 20<sup>th</sup>. I went on my own as I had nobody to go with. I sat there looking up at Buddy on the stage and knew that's what I wanted to do. After the show, I went home and sat with my guitar, played Buddy Holly

songs, and made up my mind to find other people to play with.

**How did you find people to play with at that time?**

I took myself off to a pub called “The Cross Keys” in Liverpool where they played live music. I was coming up to seventeen, and I took my guitar with me. I needed to find other musicians, as there were no groups in Liverpool at that time. Nobody met up until the Cavern opened. I met Tony Jackson at “The Cross-Keys,” and when I arrived at the pub he was singing Jailhouse Rock. We got talking, and we got on very well. He was over the moon that he had met someone who could play guitar. He invited me to his house. He was slightly older than me and married.

**Then you reconnected with John McNally, didn't you?**

Yes. That's right. I told Tony about John McNally, and we got together as a trio playing Elvis and Buddy Holly songs. We played a few gigs around Liverpool. Then suddenly, one day I was walking down and road, a bus passed, and who should get off the bus but an old school friend called Chris Crummey. He used to call me Mickey. When he saw me, he called over, “Mickey Pender... how ya doing?” We talked about our old school “St. Winnie's” (St. Winifred's). Then I told him about the group. He said, “I've just been down to Liverpool to pay the subscription on my drum kit.” I asked him to join our group—he was the last guy to join. We had myself, John, Tony, and Chris—and he became, as you know, Chris Curtis. We started playing around Liverpool and started to make a name for ourselves.

**How did you pick songs for those early shows?**

Chris had a fantastic record collection—he was so good at picking songs. So, we played all the

places around Liverpool. A DJ called Bob Wooler knew every group in the city. He was always at the Cavern to announce the groups. He told me one night, “You guys are good—but you need a vocalist.” He was right; so we got a vocalist called Johnny Sandon who had a great voice. He sounded like a cross between Jim Reeves and Johnny Cash. We got known as Johnny Sandon and the Searchers. We were a little bit different. Johnny could sing these great ballads.

**What happened to Johnny Sandon?**

A group called the Remo Four made an approach to him because they had a booking at Butlins Holiday camp for six weeks. They offered Johnny a place in the band and he left us. Then we were back as a foursome and we just carried on. I sang my song, Chris sang his, Tony Jackson sang his, and we had three singers in the band.

**He could have stayed with you. I wonder if he regretted leaving? You ended up in Hamburg playing at the Star Club, didn't you? How did that come about?**

One night we were playing the Cavern and Horst Fascher—who was the talent scout for the Star Club, Hamburg—I remember him approaching us and saying in broken English, “Hello, how are you doing? I love your band! I think you're great! I would like you to come to the Star Club in Hamburg!” The only problem with that would be that we would have to quit our jobs. I worked in a book binding factory at that time, which was a pretty good job. I forget where John worked but Tony was an electrician and Chris had a good job too. Tony and Chris thought it was our break and gave up their jobs. I remember telling my mother that I was leaving my job and going to sing at the Star Club in Hamburg. She didn't understand but we did it.

## What were your experiences like at the Star Club?

We rubbed shoulders with people like Ray Charles, Chuck Berry, Gene Vincent, Jerry Lee Lewis. All our rock and roll heroes were there. We couldn't believe it! Our German audience loved us and wanted to hear us sing our songs. We only sang cover songs, but we were good. We rehearsed every day at the Star Club. One day we were rehearsing, and Jerry Lee Lewis (who was the big star there at the time) burst into the Star Club. He was fantastic! He jumped on the stage and said, "You know my latest record? *How's My Ex Treating You?*" I had no clue and told him that I didn't know how it went. "You can't play the guitar break, man?" he said. "No worries, man—I'm gonna play it on piano!" He was a great guy and didn't mind us at all. He just had a good time. I've met him since then, and he still remembers that too!

## So how did you score your first hit, "Sweets For My Sweet?"

Well... While we were at the Star Club, Manfred Weissleder was the owner. I remember going to his office. He loved our act and signed us for another month. We came home to Liverpool and got back into the rhythm of playing local gigs, then we went back to the Star Club, played there again, and then headed back to Liverpool... and who was waiting for us but Tony Hatch? A record producer for PYE records. Our manager at the time—Les Ackerly, who owned the Iron Door club—he organized for us to do a demo of six or seven songs, one of which was "*Sweets For My Sweet*." He played the demo to Tony Hatch who wanted to come and see us in Liverpool. We played for him and he signed us up. Next thing we knew, we were in PYE studios London. Three takes later, "*Sweets For My Sweet*" was recorded.

From there we went on to have several number ones—hit records like "*Needles and Pins*," "*Don't Throw Your Love Away*," and the best year we had was 1964 when we went to America. Our manager Tito Burns said, "With your latest record, *Needles and Pins*, you've made it. I'm taking you to America." Brian Epstein liked us so much he wanted us—but Tito Burns had us and he took us to America. He got us onto the Ed Sullivan Show and we sang "*Needles and Pins*." The next thing we knew, the American public took us to heart. We toured the United States. It was a big time for us.



*"Meet The Searchers" was the first album from "The Searchers."*

## What was it like recording your first album, "Meet The Searchers?"

Thinking back, all the songs were cover versions. We just didn't have that song writing in our musical ability. We were good musicians, good vocalists, but we couldn't really write songs. The few songs we did write were used as "B" songs. We weren't like the Beatles where they could write their own material. Our albums were always covers. There's nothing wrong with that, as long as the recording company is having

success selling your records. But as the years go by, that will hold you back—that held us back. By 1966, we were starting to fade because we didn't write our own material. Looking back, I can't complain, though. That first album was great—the fans loved it.

### **Who took the lead when choosing material?**

We picked it together. Chris was the kingpin, though. He had a knack of picking songs. He found songs from his vast record collection. He found "Sweets For My Sweet" on a Drifters album. Tony Jackson took the lead and I helped on the harmonies. After the initial success with that record, Tony Hatch came up with "Sugar and Spice." Tony said, "I've got your next record—it's called Sugar and Spice." I thought it sounded awful. Chris Curtis said, "It doesn't sound good Tony." We didn't like it. It was very similar to "Sweets For My Sweet." Tony thought it was going to be a hit—the record company loved it. It went to number two on the charts. On the record label, the name given was Fred Nightingale! The guy who wrote that song was Tony Hatch.

### **He made his money from that one, I bet.**

Once you get into the recording business—we were green lads who didn't know the business. We just wanted to be famous. We were in the magazines, but we forget that the money comes from writing songs. PYE Records knew how to market The Searchers, and we had a lot of success—and we didn't mind who wrote the songs as long as we had a hit. But the next record after "Sugar and Spice," we knew it would have to be different. If we had done another song similar to the first two, people would have thought we weren't able to do anything else. PYE wanted the same again. We had to fight PYE Records to get "Needles and Pins" released.

### **Really?**

That's what happens in the music business. It was only when Tony Hatch agreed with us that we got the record released. PYE Records later realized that changing directions was a great idea because we got great acclaim from other artists for "Needles and Pins." It's still one of the most famous of our hits, and it still sounds great today.

### **"Needles and Pins" really stood out. It was different and does sound great today.**

It stood out so much at that time. People loved that it was a story about a guy who still sees a girl and she discarded him—it's a great story record.



*"Bumble Bee"—a missed hit for a great group.*

### **"Bumble Bee" was always my favorite...**

That was a novelty record. Chris Curtis came up with the song and we did it. I always took him at his word as he came up with so many of the hits. "When I Get Home," for example. Chris found that one on a jukebox. It's a Bobby Darin song and we recorded it. People today still talk about it and wonder why it wasn't a hit. I don't know?

**It's interesting how records become hits. What was it like working at PYE?**

Tony Hatch was a bit square, I thought. He wasn't really a group man. He tended to work with female artists like Petula Clark. He had great success with her; but at the time, he was a bit square for us. He played piano on many of our records and he was the guy in the box in the studio making the decisions. But we had success with him. Look at George Martin—you couldn't get squarer than him—but he had a great rapport with the Beatles. PYE knew how to market. They had the Kinks and other groups so they were into the group thing. I think we changed it for them with "Needles and Pins." If it hadn't been for Tony Hatch and our insistence, they would have gone for something similar to "Sweets For My Sweet."

**What did PYE do to get records sold?**

Once you're with a record company and you have success, you tend to leave it to your manager. Our manager, Tito Burns, would liaise with the chairman of PYE Records, Louis Benjamin, who would say yay or nay. Those guys make the decisions. We just go into the studio—Tony Hatch would tell us what was needed. I think we were oversold to some degree. I think a group only lasts so long, so they tend to oversell you. They marketed us left, right and center. We recorded in French, German; they sold us through KAPP records in America. We had the biggest American hit with "Love Potion #9." PYE were really good at working with American companies and getting our records sold there. But they can only sell you while you're big. Once you drop, they can't sell you as well.

**How often did you record, and how much do you think is still in the can?**

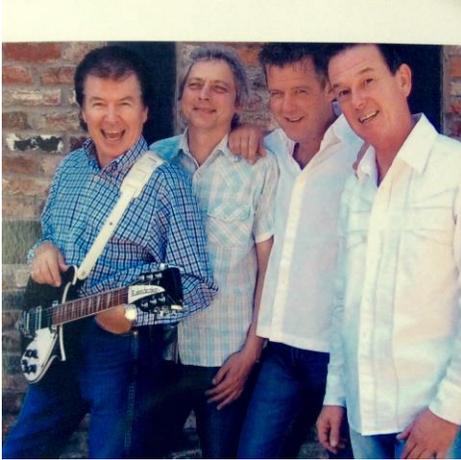
We seemed to be in the studio all the time. All our material has been released now. The record company we are with now is Sanctuary Records—our releases come out on Universal.



*Searching for hits—the boys in the Searchers.*

**How did you end up working with SIRE Records?**

They had groups like Talking Heads, Madonna. I didn't know why they wanted to sign The Searchers, but the boss over there came along to one of our shows in the early '80s and told me that he loved my vocals. He wanted to make us happen again. They put us in the studio, and we did two albums for them. It was all covers but mostly from songwriters at the time. One of the songs was given to us by Will Birch and it was called "Hearts in Her Eyes." I thought it was going to bring us back—everyone said they loved the record—neither of those albums did anything. *Rolling Stone* magazine said we were back—but it didn't happen. It just goes to prove that in this game, it doesn't matter how good the product is. If people don't buy it, then it's not going to go anywhere.



*Mike Pender's Searchers today—more than a nostalgia act.*

**I guess that was the problem with your fourth album—fantastic album but it didn't seem to go anywhere...**

By then we had faded so much we weren't strong enough to chart. Two of the guys had gone—but myself and McNally kept it going until the '80s. Then I left and formed my own version of "The Searchers." Why did I do that? Well, what was the future? The future was singing our old hits. That's what all of us are doing—even Elton John.

**It's all very true. "Take Me For What I'm Worth" was a really strong album, wasn't it?**

It had some good stuff on it. But it became a collector's type album. The fans who had always followed us liked it because we changed direction a little bit. I thought it was a good song, a good album.

**Readers can learn more about your life from your new memoir—correct?**

Yes! They certainly can. That book allowed me to fulfil a wish—that wish was to set out my life story as lead singer/guitarist and founder member of The Searchers, and to actually be

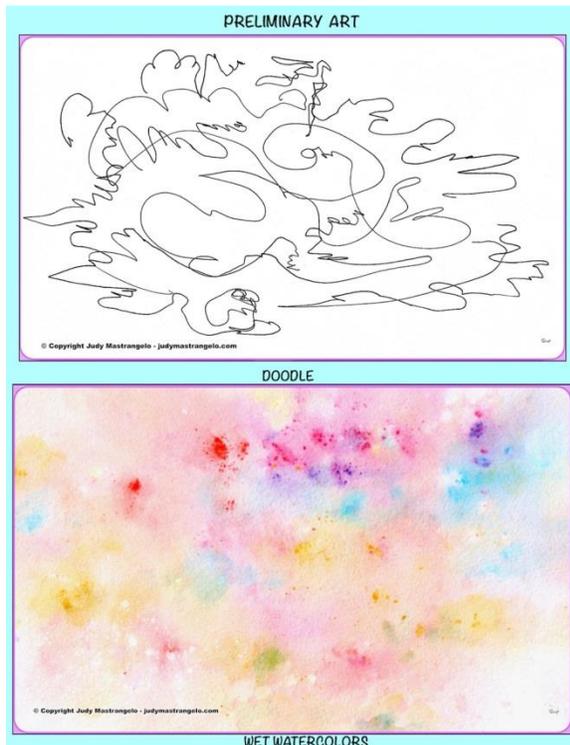
able to tell the story exactly as it happened. We enjoyed great success, we played all over the world, but that success was interspersed with changes in the line-up and bitter disputes, which led to broken friendships and an ultimate parting of the ways. I think readers will really enjoy the book. It's called "[The Search For Myself](#)" and it's available now on [Amazon](#).

**I think it sounds fascinating. You're still working. How do you keep up the schedule?**

For me, it's nostalgia and a walk down memory lane. People ask me if I ever think about retiring - sometimes I do. My wife, May, (who, incidentally, I met at the Cavern in 1961) reminds me how old I am! But I still feel I'm about fifty! Okay... sixty. The thing in this game is that age is just a number. As long as you feel you can still sing, you can do it. You have to have the energy to do it. I'm doing a small tour at the moment with New Amen Corner—but I start a big tour in October where I will do over sixty shows, and that's with other people from the sixties—Herman's Hermits, Chris Farlowe, The Fortunes—a nostalgic tour with nostalgic people. You pace yourself. How long does life go on? If you can still do it, you should do it.

# INSIDE ILLUSTRATIONS WITH ARTIST JUDY MASTRANGELO

## INSPIRATION Part 1



I'd like to discuss INSPIRATION as part of the Creation Process. This will be my first of several articles in a series on this topic.

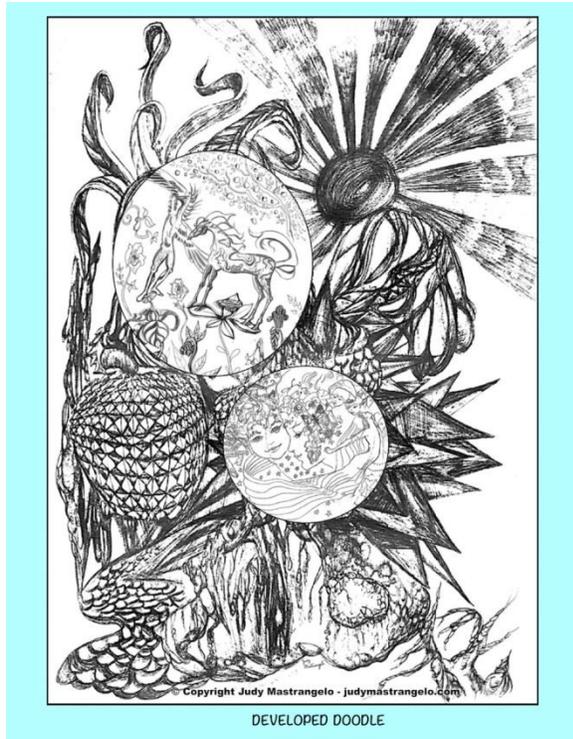
I am basically a visual artist, and I love to create paintings. I also use my paintings and drawings to illustrate books, both original ones written by me, plus stories in the public domain. The method of Inspiration for my artwork is something that I've been developing all of my life. I

term it "MIND PAINTING." I'll describe it briefly here, and then I'll go into more detail in subsequent articles on the subject.

To describe it in succinct way, this method is something that many creative people use, be they graphic artists, writers, music composers, etc. The concept of an idea, or as I term it "Vision," very often appears as a "bolt of lighting flash," whether as a visual image, an idea for a book or play, or a musical composition. Often it comes when we are least expecting it. My "Visions," which are visual images of finished paintings, appear in my mind when I am daydreaming, or at nighttime when I'm drifting into sleep. They can manifest either with my eyes open or closed.

In order to encourage a "Vision" concept for my artwork to appear, I try to relax, and let images flow through my mind, as if watching a movie. Another way to conceive of an image is to dream on something amorphous, such as Clouds or Water. Often you can see imaginative things in them. Also, doodling is fun, and a good way to evolve an idea. You can just take pen or pencil in hand, and scribble away. It's amazing what could develop from this. Along a similar vein, try the following: Get a heavy piece of watercolor paper soaking wet. Then just drop or spatter watercolors on it and watch them all run together. Use your imagination, and you will see images forming in various forms, which you could develop into a painting.

The next step, after these preliminary techniques, is of course to then begin to develop your painting in glorious detail. I show here pictures of some of my preliminary techniques, plus an elaborate doodle that I enjoyed developing.



Being a movie buff myself, sometimes I get ideas for my art work from films that I love. In this painting, entitled "CRICKET CONCERT," I have dressed the little insects in costumes inspired by elaborate outfits in the wonderful film "AMADEUS." It is about the life of Mozart.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amadeus\\_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amadeus_(film))

Among the many themes I love to paint are Arthurian ones, such as the painting "MERLIN AND ARTHUR." I've seen quite a few films about the legend of King Arthur, which are thrilling to me.

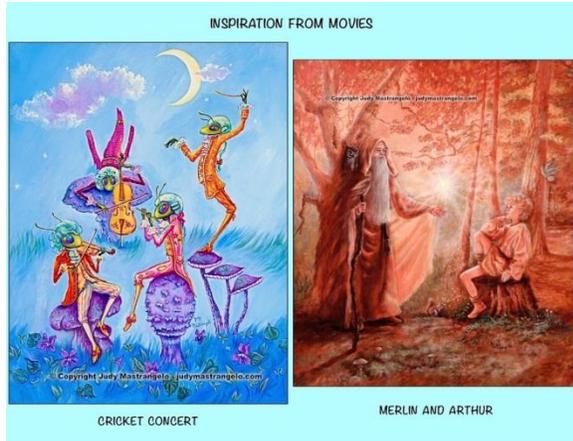
I've written a series of 7 interviews called "A NIGHT AT THE MOVIES," in which I describe my love for the movies that have influenced me. You can read about this 7-part series here on my WEBSITE INTERVIEW page:

<https://judymastrangelo.com/category/interviews/>

Great literature is also another wonderful inspiration for me. One of my favorite genres is fantasy. Here I show some famous stories that I've illustrated on canvas, such as THE WIZARD OF OZ, ROMEO AND JULIET, and two ALICE IN WONDERLAND pieces.

Nature is also a great inspiration to me, in so many ways. I love to walk in the great outdoors, and see trees, gardens, animals, etc. Sometimes when observing nature forms, my imagination is stimulated in a fanciful way, and I might see personified figures in trees, mountains, clouds, etc. Here I show how I've painted Nature Spirits in trees, such as the "Dryads" depicted in the Greek myths.

I'm speaking here of course, about my own personal favorite subjects that I love to illustrate in my artwork and books. I'm sure you have many of your own themes that excite and inspire you to create, in the art forms that you choose. I encourage you to try some of my methods, which have also been used by many people throughout the ages. It's quite a rewarding experience.

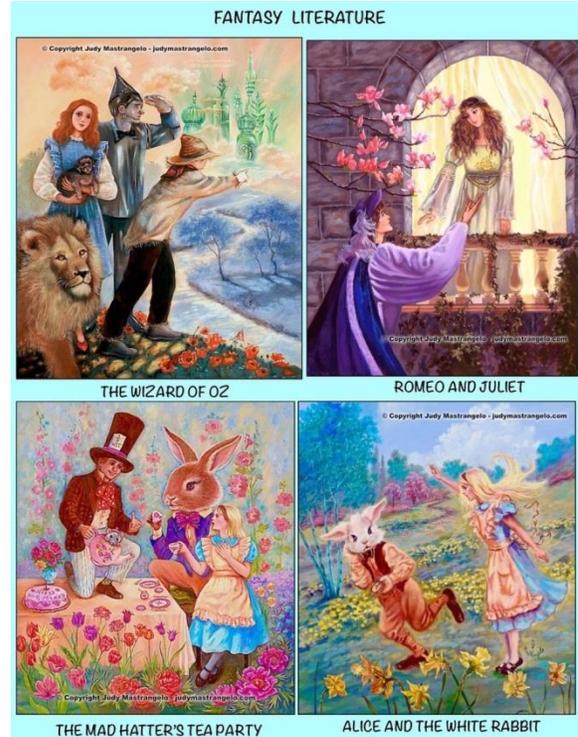


As I've mentioned before, the art of drawing and painting gives me great joy. I know it will give you the same.

I have recently recorded several series of podcasts on YouTube about my painting techniques and the steps I take in the creation of my artwork. Please visit them and let me know what you think. My most recent series of 5 podcasts is about the creation of my painting "WELCOME TO MAKE BELIEVE."

<https://judymastrangelo.com/category/podcasts/>

I speak about my painting techniques in my book "PAINTING FAIRIES AND OTHER FANTASIES." I think you will find it interesting.



In it there are also some downloadable tutorials which are very helpful.

<https://judymastrangelo.com/books-2/painting-fairies-other-fantasies/>

My books are going to be published by DSP very soon, under the new imprint title of "IMAGINATION BOOKS." They will include many exciting titles in several formats, including AUDIO BOOKS, EBOOKS, HARDCOVER FANTASY, and fun filled ACTIVITY books for the entire family. I'm also now developing a wonderful series of creative COLORING BOOKS for both adults and children. They will have themes such as: FANTASY, ELVES and FAIRIES, ANGELS, FAIRY TALES, LANDSCAPES and FLOWERS, and WHIMSICAL ANIMALS. You can get an idea of my current books in print on my website book page:

<https://judymastrangelo.com/portfolio/books/>

To find out more about my artwork  
please visit my website at:  
[www.judymastrangelo.com](http://www.judymastrangelo.com)



While you're there, please sign up for  
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<http://judymastrangelo.com/newsletter/>

# THE MOVIE MAN!

## HOW WESTERN AUTHOR MARK BAUGHER TOOK HIS BOOK AND TURNED IT INTO A MOTION PICTURE



*How did all this happen? Strange, really. Here is the story.*

I am the last person in the world who wanted to go on a cruise. I dragged my feet for years but finally gave in, in 2007. It was not Arizona. Crowded, humid and the food was like eating at the Golden Corral three times a day. I was dying inside. I was sitting on the deck of this monstrosity of a boat when a man next to me

struck up a conversation. He asked me if I wanted to get in a poker game on the tenth floor of the ship. Out of boredom, I went.

Lo and behold, I'm sitting with Bruce Channel. You know the guy—he wrote the hit song “Hey Baby.” I asked him how many times he had sung that song in his life. He said thousands. I asked him if he was beyond tired of the song. Here is what he said: “Not at all. People love the song so much that I enjoy it every time we do it.”

That was a powerful moment for me. I realized that he had created a song that people listened to and forgot all their troubles. This song would be out there for a thousand years, helping people cope with life. For just a minute, they had no relationship problems. No money problems. No worries about children. The list is endless. I said a prayer at that moment. I told the Lord that if I could do something like that, I would feel like I had contributed something to the world.

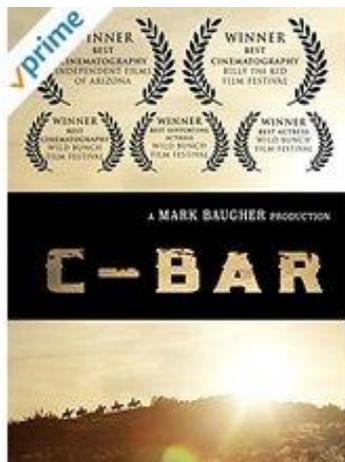
I won eight dollars, suffered through the cruise, and went back to my beloved Arizona. Thank God, I was home. The next year, the great recession arrived and hit my world hard. My assets were saying goodbye, and I was very down and out. To add to the problem, my wife had a health issue that kicked me around like a tin can.

To cope, I hid in a little shed we have and started writing. It was as if someone else was writing the story. It poured out of me. Quite amazing, really. I had never written anything. Barely got out of high school. Writing C-Bar saved my sanity. A few months later, it was on Amazon. I sold absolutely no copies. Then I got a phone call from a film maker named Patrick Ball. He had my book and wanted to make a movie. The book was given to him by someone I had given it to. So, we made the movie C-Bar. The movie has won several

awards. It's the most fun thing I have ever done in my life. I was on a roll.

I then find Dusty Saddle Publishing and a young publicist named Nick Wale. They liked my work, believed in me, and thanks to them, I'm selling novels. Who knew? Even now when someone tells me they like C-Bar, I assume they have me mixed up with someone else.

I had a man call me, saying he lives with chronic pain, but my novel took him out of his pain for a little while. He appreciated what I had done. Truth is, I choked up over this. I had done just what I said a prayer about. Is there a God? I don't know. Did God respond to me during that poker game? I don't know that, either. All I know is that I am the last person anyone expected to write a successful book. One of my friends said, "Did you really write that book?" All I could say was, "I think so, but I'm not really sure."



*Rancher Dockie Barnett lives on the C-Bar Ranch with his wife and two children. After finding a young girl whose family was brutally murdered, the Barnett gang set out to hunt the evil men who committed the crime... Click [here](#) to watch this great movie today on [Amazon](#). You can also pre-order your copy of the upcoming "C-Bar" novelization [here](#).*

# PAINTING WITH WORDS:

AN INTERVIEW WITH  
WESTERNER'S OWN  
ILLUSTRATOR JUDY  
MASTRANGELO.



*If a picture paints a thousand words then Westerner illustrator Judy Mastrangelo must have written tens of thousands of books. This interview is with a talented artist who has turned her attention to the book world. Her beautifully illustrated children's books have been well received, and this interview should give you a taste of her talent... We at Westerner thought it was about time you met our favorite illustrator!*

*You can learn more about Judy Mastrangelo by visiting her website [here](#). Don't forget to subscribe to her [YouTube channel](#) to learn more about her great work.*

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**Good morning!**

Good morning to you, too!

**Let me start by asking you this. Is it important for an artist to be creative, or can you be an artist without creativity?**

I think it's very important for an artist to be creative. I really don't know how an artist can help but be creative, since it is the very substance and nature of art.

**Where do artists find their audience?**

Audiences can be found online, of course, through social media such as Facebook, etc. Various types of agents, such as licensing and public relations agents, can help an artist enlarge their audiences. And, of course, you can develop an audience in your local community, through schools, art galleries, etc.

**What would your biggest piece of advice be for a young artist?**

Find a genre of art that you really love, and then work very hard to develop your talent to be able to create that type of work. It does take a lot of effort to do so, but if you really love it, you will experience tremendous joy in your artistic journey.

I, myself, am always learning and developing my artwork. I feel that my painting is always in need of improvement. I always find inspiration from the great artists of the past. By looking at the work of these amazing masters, I am constantly awed by their masterpieces and am encouraged to then develop my own talent.

I'd also suggest that you endeavor to become friends with those in the artistic community of the type of art you enjoy. Some of these people might be newcomers to that field, too; and you can share stories of your trials and tribulations. And you also might be lucky enough to communicate with successful artists in that genre, whose work you greatly admire. Sometimes these well-known artists might have some time to be in communication

with their fans and to give them encouragement and advice.

**How many different kinds of projects have you worked on?**

I've worked on many kinds of art projects, such as books, and creating wallpaper art, etc. I must say that it's been mostly very enjoyable and rewarding.

**Where is your favorite place to work?**

I mostly like to paint in the comfort of my own home, but I have had fun creating in many varied environments.

**Have you ever painted something you didn't like?**

Yes. And it didn't turn out very well. I'll talk more about that experience later. It's a funny story.

**Does creativity begin to become stifled if you are working as an artist, rather than just being an artist?**

If you mean working as an "Artist for Hire," it all depends. Many of my paintings that I've done in the past as commissions turned out very well.

I don't do commissioned work anymore, though. I prefer to "just be an artist" and to paint what my inspiration beckons me to create at the moment.

**Why did you want to start working on books?**

I do enjoy stories, and illustrated books have always been a great love of mine ever since I was young. Therefore, it was very natural to me to want to create art books with text and illustrations in them.

**Where does your love of fairies come from?**

The World of Fairies is an innate love of mine, since I'm an imaginative person. I've never really "seen" a fairy, but I feel their "presence" within flowers and other forms of nature. It's a very fascinating realm to me, and this world gives me great pleasure to depict through my art.

**Do you enjoy reading fantasy novels such as "Lord of the Rings"?**

Yes, of course, I do appreciate reading novels such as this. But I must admit that I also very much enjoy seeing the wonderful fantasy films that have been made of these endearing stories.

It's truly a delight for me, as a graphic artist, to actually see great fantasy literature in all its glory and color depicted on the screen. When you read a story, you picture the characters in your own mind; but to see the fantastic way that they have been created in film, plus watching them portrayed by actors whom you know and love, is a wonderful experience! And, of course, I have no problem with the amazing modern digital special effects that are used in these films. I'm not a purist there.

**Do you enjoy teaching art?**

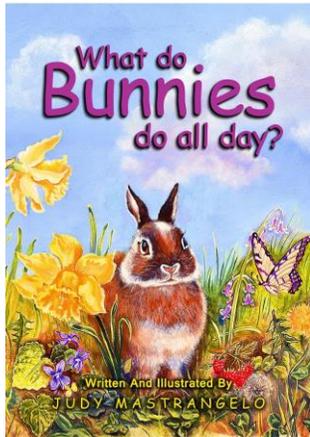
Yes, I do enjoy teaching art. I love to impart my experiences in the development of my craft to others of all ages. It's wonderful for me to see people with artistic talents. It is very satisfying to know that I might have a hand in encouraging people to develop a love for art and for creating their own craft.

I've worked for several years on writing a book about this so that I can share my artistic philosophy and experiences with others. At last, this book recently has been published as an eBook on Kindle: "PAINTING FAIRIES AND OTHER FANTASIES," and I hope that people will enjoy it and benefit by it: <http://www.amazon.com/dp/B00TA4ZYRG>

In the book is included a link where you can download free printable pages of my Painting Tutorials. These pages will be added to often, so that you can always download new ones when I post them from time to time. In this way, I can teach art to a worldwide audience. It is very gratifying.

**Is there anything you haven't painted already that you would love to paint?**

I have so many things that I would enjoy painting, which I haven't yet done. It would take me many lifetimes to be able to do so. I have quite a few "visions" that I see in my mind, all calling me to be put on canvas. These are my own fantasies, and I look forward to bringing them into being for others to enjoy.



*This little book of about 200 words, from Judy Mastrangelo, will delight even the very young toddler. In this gentle story, illustrated by exquisite watercolors, Little Bunny learns that whatever he does is all right with Mother Bunny. Parents can use this story as an introduction to telling their own child that no matter what, he or she will still be loved. Why don't you grab yourself a copy today by clicking [here!](#)*

# THE PARANORMAL CORNER

WITH G. MICHAEL  
VASEY



## The Knock at Your Door!

It is the story of a very strange and frightening encounter that is repeated over and over by hundreds, if not thousands, of people all over the world. It is late at night and there is a knock at your door. You answer it to find a couple of small kids standing on your doorstep. The kids seem to be dressed in strange, sometimes old-fashioned, clothes, but the strangest part is why would two

young kids be on your doorstep at 11pm at night? Initially, you are concerned. Have they been in a car accident? Where are their parents? Then, you feel a deep-seated and inexplicable fear arise from deep within your soul.

“Let us in,” says one of the small children.

By now, every instinct in your body is telling you to slam the door shut. The fear is overwhelming. But... fear of what? Two small kids?

“Let us in. We need to use your phone,” says the kid in a monotone, almost hypnotic, voice.

There you are on the one hand, overwhelmed by a terrible sense of danger and yet, you feel yourself being sucked in, wondering why such small children are on your doorstep.

“Let us in. You have to give us permission,” says the kid again, insistently.

You begin to open the door as the kids step forward. The fear reaches its maximum as you see their eyes for the first time in the light of your hallway. They are totally and utterly *black*.

You slam the door shut, bolt it and head inside. You are shaking in terror, haunted by those soulless eyes and the hypnotic effect of the monotone voice. The knocking grows louder and louder until, all of a sudden, it stops. Carefully,

you overcome the fear just enough to peek outside through the window. The kids have gone.

You had a lucky escape.

The Black-Eyed Kids phenomenon is truly mysterious. Who are these kids? What do they really want?

When the first story of a Black-Eyed Kid encounter was submitted to my website – My Haunted Life Too – I can honestly say that it was the first time I was shaken by an experience that someone had sent in. It sent shivers down my spine, and for weeks afterwards, I was anticipating that very same knock at the door.

The first submission read like this...

*A few months ago, I visited my mother in Amarillo. She lives in a nice area that has a good reputation. I was expecting to have a nice vacation and spend some quality time with her, as she is getting older. We spent the afternoon together and that evening, she went to bed. I wasn't tired so I decided to watch some TV, and catch up with my friends on Facebook. About an hour later there was a knock on the door. I was a little taken aback as this area was normally dead after ten.*

*I went into the kitchen to try and look out to see who was at the door. The knocking was persistent. It wasn't like the average elder visit, where a knock would be followed by silence. This was a constant tap-tap-tap.*

*I was starting to get tired of this idiot knocking on the door, so I went to the porch and opened the door. Two teenagers stood there. One looked around fourteen, the other around sixteen. I instantly wondered if they were at the wrong house as I was the only person under thirty in my family. There was no possible reason for these kids to be here.*

*They said nothing, so I asked them what they wanted. The older one told me that he was sorry for waking me up, but wanted to come in and use the phone. He explained that they had been left in the area by their parents and needed to call someone. As he finished speaking, he just stared at me. When I saw his eyes, I couldn't tear myself away. They were completely black. Just black. I couldn't break away from his gaze. I had a huge urge to just stand back and let them in. As we stood there staring at each other, he started talking again. This time he wasn't asking. He was demanding that I let him in. The façade was gone. Whatever he wanted would only "take a few moments" and then they would leave. He wanted me to "let him in and help him."*

*I broke my eyes away and realized that I was actually stepping backwards. I hurriedly told them to get off the porch and find help elsewhere. I closed the door with them still standing there and headed towards the phone. I called the police and told them that there were a couple of kids in the area who seemed to be up to no good. They told me later that they did a thorough check—but didn't find anything. No one else in the area had seen them either. My mother hadn't even heard them or the knocking. When I told her about it, she just dismissed it as the youth of today with poor manners.*

*She didn't see their eyes. I felt absolutely terrified, and I felt at odds with their will. I think they meant to do me harm. Has anyone else had any experience with black-eyed kids?*

*Submitted by Deana M.*

Like many others that came flooding in after this one was published, the location was Texas or the southern states. Not that all Black-Eyed Kid stories originate from there; we have also had encounters submitted from the UK, Australia, and elsewhere.

What happens to those who let the kids into their home? Well, there are very few stories I'm aware of (and trust me – I have spent hours researching this!) where this has occurred, but

when the BEK were allowed in to the home, it resulted in disastrous consequences. One story of such an encounter follows the now all too familiar horrifying sequence of an unexpected knock at the door at 2am. Two small children stand there, and the man answering the door inexplicably was totally unnerved by them. Thinking the kids had got lost or perhaps there had been an accident, he lets the kids in and his wife makes cocoa for them. He keeps asking them what has happened, and they keep on repeating, “not to worry as their parents would be there soon.”

The scared and concerned couple started to notice that their pets were behaving strangely. The husband began also to feel dizzy and strange as he sat with the kids. When the woman of the house returns with the cocoa, she almost drops it when they look at her and she sees that their eyes are completely black. At this point the kids ask to use the bathroom, and husband and wife start to discuss the scene. His nose starts bleeding profusely. Then, just as inexplicably, the power goes out and they find themselves in darkness. They stand in the darkness in total fear until suddenly, the kids leave abruptly, saying that their parents had arrived, leaving the front door wide open. Outside, the woman can see a car idling on the street and two tall, dark-suited adults. After a while, the power came back on.

After that, nothing was the same. The cats disappeared. The pet bird died of a hemorrhage in a pool of blood in its cage. The husband's nosebleeds became progressively worse, and he was then diagnosed with skin cancer; meanwhile, the wife also began to suffer dizzy spells and nosebleeds. Had the encounter with the BEK caused this?

This strange and sinister testimony resulted in suggestions in some quarters that the BEK were some form of soul eaters or demons. Their hypnotic effect keeping a terrified victim who somehow senses the danger, transfixed. The BEK want to get close to their intended victim and more importantly, they want you to grant permission to let them in. Let them in to what? Your soul?

The BEK suck your life energy; feed off of it. Given permission to come in, they devour your soul. Let's face facts. In this modern era, many people don't know or believe that they have a soul, and they do little to protect or preserve it. They would never believe that other creatures may want it from you, and by the time they realize this, it is too late.

Black eyes are used to denote evilness or possession in movies and urban legends, but they also feature widely in occult mythology. For example, the Iroquois Indians believed in a dark

power called the Otkon that could take over children and an 'Evil One' who would mate with human females to produce black-eyed, chalky skinned children. These children were killed by the tribe soon after birth and burned to stop them from resurrecting. Children wandering alone in the woods could also be taken over by Otkon and would re-emerge with black eyes and pale skin, acting nervously while repeating themselves over and over. Their goal was to destroy the tribe and infect all the people with Otkon. Could this be the true origin of the BEK urban legend in America?

So what are the BEK? Are the BEK then a form of soul-eating Demon? Are they simply a modern manifestation of a whole host of semi-mythical occult creatures that seek permission to enter (you) and have certain strange physical characteristics that mark them out as not entirely human - like black eyes? Are they really demons that walk among us?

Legends and myths are full of them. They occupy the dark forests, lonely and desolate places, waiting to steal our souls. They occupy the far recesses of our minds where they haunt our nightmares and imaginations creating fear. Perhaps it is that they feed on? Or perhaps, they really are seeking souls... Here is another encounter submitted to the site that might just provide a clue.

*I've read a lot of your stories about Black-Eyed people and would like to share an experience my brother had some years ago, in Nashville. This is a true story he related to me one night over a beer. My brother is an extremely serious man and I wouldn't bet against his word.*

*The story my brother shared with me was about extremely strange, evil, and clairvoyant black-eyed man that he and his friends encountered a few years back in Nashville, TN.*

*My brother and his buddies were having dinner at a restaurant when a strange man walked into the restaurant and made for their table. At first my brother just thought he was a friendly drunk. He kept his head down, walked erratically and seemed to have no concept of there being other people in the restaurant. This man sat down at their table and tried to make as though he knew what they were talking about. But it was strange — he laughed at all the wrong things and talked over other people. He seemed to have no concept at all about people.*

*His appearance was more of a nuisance than anything else at this point, and none of the guys seemed interested in talking to this stranger, but he managed to make his way into their circle. The man seemed to want to just melt into the group.*

*He kept looking towards the door as though he expected someone to come in after him.*

*My brother said that out of nowhere the mood of this stranger changed completely, and so did the subject matter, as he asked my brother's friend, "If I could give you anything, what would it be?"*

*At first the friend laughed it off, but the stranger let it be known by his tone that he was completely serious, and he asked him again, "If I could give you anything?"*

*The friend replied something like, "I don't know, man.... Money and Lindsay Lohan as my girlfriend."*

*Well, things got weird when the stranger admitted how he could do these things for him in exchange for his soul. He then started openly sharing the details of his possession, and how it was his duty to find a human willing to sacrifice his soul, one person every year or something like that.*

*My brother noticed his eyes became blackened at some point, and the most indescribable evil aura was around him. The guys were all getting freaked out, yet still thought this guy was probably full of it. The stranger wanted to prove his ability, so he asked the guy to ask him any question about himself, and he could answer it.*

*So, my brother's friend asked, "Okay, what is my grandma's name?"*

*The demon man answered, "Megan Jane Hofstetter."*

*Which was, to their amazement, correct! At this point, things were getting strange and it was getting very late. My brother and his friends decided to get the hell out of there. The man didn't follow them but they couldn't get him out of their heads that night. All of them dreamed about that man.*

*The next day they decided to head home and cut their journey short. What stands out most to my brother is the incredibly evil, creepy, strange feeling that he and his friends all witnessed and felt firsthand. I wanted to share this story as it fascinated me for years. The problem is it is very creepy to talk about, but I have this urge, I can't explain, to talk about it.*

*Submitted by James Deacon, TN*

I don't know what they are, but I will tell you this: The next time there is a knock at your door, you will you answer it with trepidation.

Finally, just bear this in mind. There are those who believe that once you know and have heard

about the BEK, you will have an encounter with them.

Over the coming months, do stop by my column for a scary tale or two.... And perhaps leave me yours at [My Haunted Life Too](#).

Good luck!

# HISTORICAL CORNER:

## SLAVERY AFTER SLAVERY

WITH FRED STAFF



Fred Staff was born in Seminole and raised in Pawnee, Oklahoma. His love of history drove him to write books that make history come alive and at the same time gives the reader action and excitement. The numerous reviews he has received on his first book, ROCHA'S TREASURE OF POTOSI, explains why it is a best seller in Bolivia and highly acclaimed in the USA.

He has followed this work with the Bass Reeves trilogy, an adult history of, without a doubt, the most amazing U.S. Marshal ever to serve the Federal Courts. The first three books in his Bass Reeves series were top twenty bestsellers.

The terms "action-packed" and "could not put it down" are the most common remarks made in the numerous reviews of his work.

\*\*\*\*\*

The Civil War had many effects on the lives of all Americans. It brought freedom to many and hardship to nearly all. One great change was the loss of a labor source to the South.

The turmoil in the south not only brought about labor shortages, but intensified lawlessness. Most southern military personal came home to a life nothing like they had left. Their homes were destroyed and their source of income no longer existed, and any semblance of law and order was in disarray.

In many cases, the violence in their past had become acceptable. Most had returned with the only skill they had practiced—violence for survival.

Crime became the way of life for many. This included the white returning soldiers as well as the freed slaves, who had lost any semblance of a home base.

Most of the prisons in the South had been destroyed. Without a tax base to repair the millions of dollars of infrastructure, the states were in no condition to rebuild prisons.

The solution to this problem was the renting or leasing out of convicts to farmers, industry or mines. This not only relieved the state from feeding and housing the convicts, it became a source of much needed funds.

There were no rules or regulations of how a convict would be treated or used. The fact that the renter did not own the person made them even less concerned with their survival.

An example of what took place is the case of The Old Slop Mine.

This mine was located about two and a half miles from Coal Hill, Arkansas. The workers were all leased from the state of Arkansas. Because convicts were used, the locals called it "the convict mine." It was in operation from 1877 to 1889.

Convicts who would not work as instructed or attempted in any way to be disruptive were beaten. Often these beatings were so severe that permanent damage was done, and in some cases death occurred.

Health and sanitation was not offered. After all, the only thing the owners had invested was the monthly payment for the convict.

In the case of death, the owners buried the person in the mine tailings and then plowed the area in order that a fresh grave could not be noticed.

There was a family that lived close to the mine, and they allowed the convicts to get water from their well.

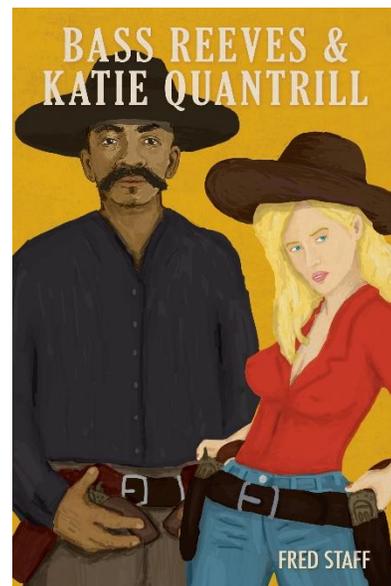
The lady of the house became so upset at the way the workers were treated and the starvation that was apparent, that she fixed a huge meal of chicken and dumplings. She gave the meal to a trustee who came for water. She instructed him to take it back and share it with the others.

On the way back, the aroma and thought of food overcame the trustee, and he found a shade tree and started to eat. He apparently couldn't stop eating, and he died of overconsumption.

All of these things put together finally made the convicts rebel. They overpowered the guards who were overseeing them and took control of the interior of the mine. They built a canon out of pipe and used dynamite to send projectiles into any attempt that was made to dislodge them. Their frustration had kept them from good planning, as they were soon out of food. The only water they had to drink came from the seepage in the mine. The single thing that allowed them to hold out as long as they did was the fact that they killed the mules and ate them.

Their demand for decent food and care was not met, and they finally had to surrender. What the fate of the rebels was is not known, except all conclude that the future for them was not any better than when they made attempts for change.

This is considered by many the first set down strike in U.S. history.



Catch the latest Fred Staff Western bestseller [here](#) today.

# THE MAN WITH THE CREATIVE MAGIC:

## AN INTERVIEW WITH TOP WESTERN COVER DESIGNER KEVIN W. DIAMOND



*To celebrate the anniversary of the latest Alex Cord Western, “[High Moon](#),” we thought it would be great to put together an interview with the designer behind that great new Cord cover. His name is Kevin Diamond, and he has been working on a number of covers for some of the biggest names in the book business. For those who are wondering what it is like to work with Alex Cord—and other Western authors--this is the interview for you. Enjoy!*

**How did you get into the business of creating covers?**

The straight-forward way. I went to school for a degree in Fine Arts, then spent years working as

an art director for printed materials, then as a television and movie producer before taking up book covers. It’s been a roundabout path, but the basic techniques for creating scenic design for plays and movies is essentially the same as what you do to make a cover. The variety of themes creating covers is really engaging. One day, you are doing space epics; the next day, period detective stories. I love it.

**You worked on the last Alex Cord cover—was it a foregone conclusion that you’d work on his latest cover?**

Hardly. Alex wanted the best cover he could get for his book. He shopped around, and mercifully he enjoyed our last project together, so when he offered, I jumped at it.

**What were you told was needed? Were there any set criteria for the new cover?**

Alex had a very specific image in mind for his cover. That image involved a lot of action, cannon fire and explosions. We discussed the nature of the book, the time period and the emotional message he was trying to communicate to readers. The result was a very complicated, layered composition that carried forward his vision.

**How did you start the cover? What elements did you pick out first?**

The first thing we needed was a typeface that worked for his cover. It has strong Western and Hispanic themes, so I wanted to find a typeface that matched. Then began the long task of acquiring images that would be able to be assembled into the composition he was looking for. It took long hours searching multiple photography sites to find everything I needed.

**What did you want the cover to convey?**

Alex wanted action and romance. So I was trying to convey an image that showed conflict, heroism and the reason why someone would put oneself through that.

**How were your early drafts received by Alex?**

Alex has been great to work with. His experience working in motion pictures has made him very savvy to what he is looking for in an action shot. I had a bit too much smoke in the early drafts. In fact, I think that was his biggest reoccurring comment: "Less smoke!"

**How did the final cover differ from your early drafts?**

Alex was looking for a very simple, elegant love story in the middle of very explosive conflict. My early drafts were a grander Hispanic motif and style that was gradually made much more humble. I still like my initial design, but I think Alex got it right on what the story needed.

**How long did it take for you to finish the cover? Was it a long process?**

This was a very technical compilation of images that took a good deal of time to assemble. It took a long time to build and to get all the files set for physical printing versus an electronic copy. Actual jackets for books are much more demanding in terms of quality than a 75-dpi electronic format.

**How do you think readers will feel about this new cover?**

I hope it engages them and makes them want to pick up and read (buy) the book. Alex wrote a great action-packed story, and I hope the cover does it justice.

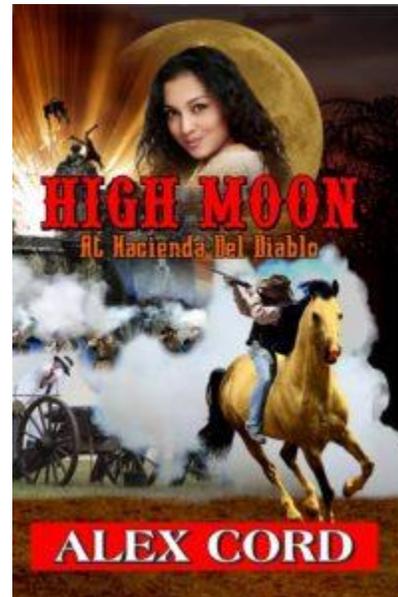
**Would you be interested in doing other Western covers?**

Anytime, anywhere. I am a big fan of Western history, books and movies. The imagery and the whole epic scope of the American Western is a lot of fun to create. Anyone looking for Western covers, it would be an honor and pleasure to work on your project.

**Did you enjoy reading the latest Alex Cord Western, High Noon?**

Alex knows his horses and knows his guns, and it comes across in his writing. This is a book written by a man who has lived the Western life. The

texture and flavor of the world he knows comes across in every scene.



*You can learn more about Kevin Diamond by visiting his website [here](#). You can also connect with Kevin via Facebook by clicking [here](#). Don't forget that you can also purchase your copy of this great Alex Cord Western right [here](#).*



## **THE WESTERNER© MAGAZINE TO DEBUT THE WESTERNER© TOP TEN IN OUR OCTOBER ISSUE**

by Bruce Bennett

We're excited over the fast-growing readership of the new Westerner© magazine and want to provide more resources for Western readers to access new and popular books on sale today. With this in mind, we are forging forward with our new Westerner© Top Ten, which will debut in the next issue that will also feature top country recording artist Charley Pride.

Our editorial staff will be searching all sales outlets to find which books are currently favorites among readers in the Western genre.

We will be using an algorithm, developed by a leading national economist, to determine which of those titles are best-sellers at the time of publishing. Our staff will continue to monitor the market to create a dynamic list that will publish periodically in our magazine.

This is an exciting and new way to connect more Western readers with the books they prefer. We've been asked by many readers to develop more content that features new Western authors and their writing. The top ten will be one tool that helps identify which books are being widely read by our audience.

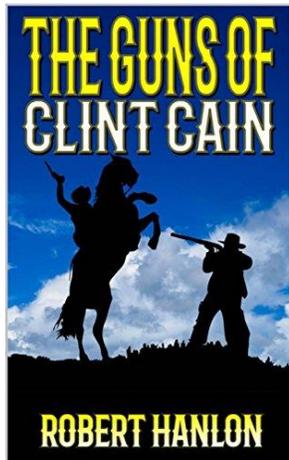
Look for more future features that will concentrate directly on the Western book market. Besides bringing the best in Western culture, and exciting articles and interviews with interesting personalities, we want to be a good resource for all things Western.

Thank you for your readership, and please send your thoughts and ideas to me at [dustysaddlepublishing@gmail.com](mailto:dustysaddlepublishing@gmail.com).

BB

# REVIEW CORNER

WITH LON HAMILTON



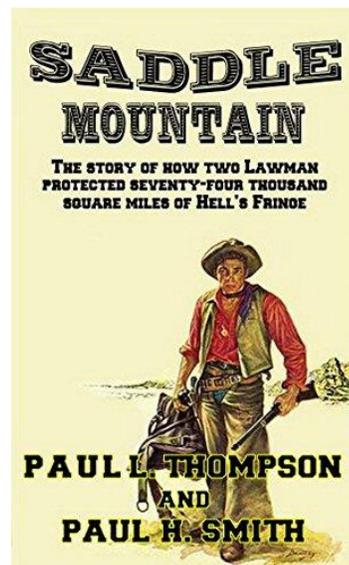
“The Guns of Clint Cain” – Robert Hanlon

Top Western fun from Robert Hanlon. This is the latest in a series of bestsellers from one of the hottest Western authors on the market. But is it any good? We can answer—Yes. It’s one of the better Hanlon books to hit the market in recent months. Westerner rates “[The Guns of Clint Cain](#)” as a five-star read.



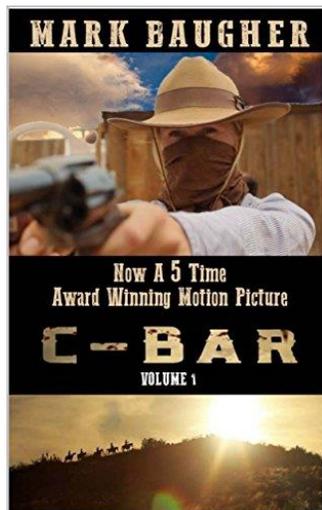
Bass Reeves and Katie Quantrill – Fred Staff

The latest release from Fred Staff is a quandary. It’s action-packed and dramatic, for sure—but it is a departure for Staff. Will Western readers love this one as much as they loved his Bass Reeves series? Probably. It’s certainly worth the price of admission. Westerner rates “[Bass Reeves and Katie Quantrill](#)” as a four and a half star read.



“Saddle Mountain” – Paul L. Thompson and Paul H. Smith

The latest in a long stream of hits for the ever-popular Paul L. Thompson. This one is a bit of a departure for the man who made his name with U.S. Marshal Shorty Thompson, but is the next natural evolutionary step for an author who has never struggled to find stories. I wouldn't be surprised to see this novel at number one—a feat Thompson has scored four times already. Westerner rates "[Saddle Mountain](#)" as a five-star read.



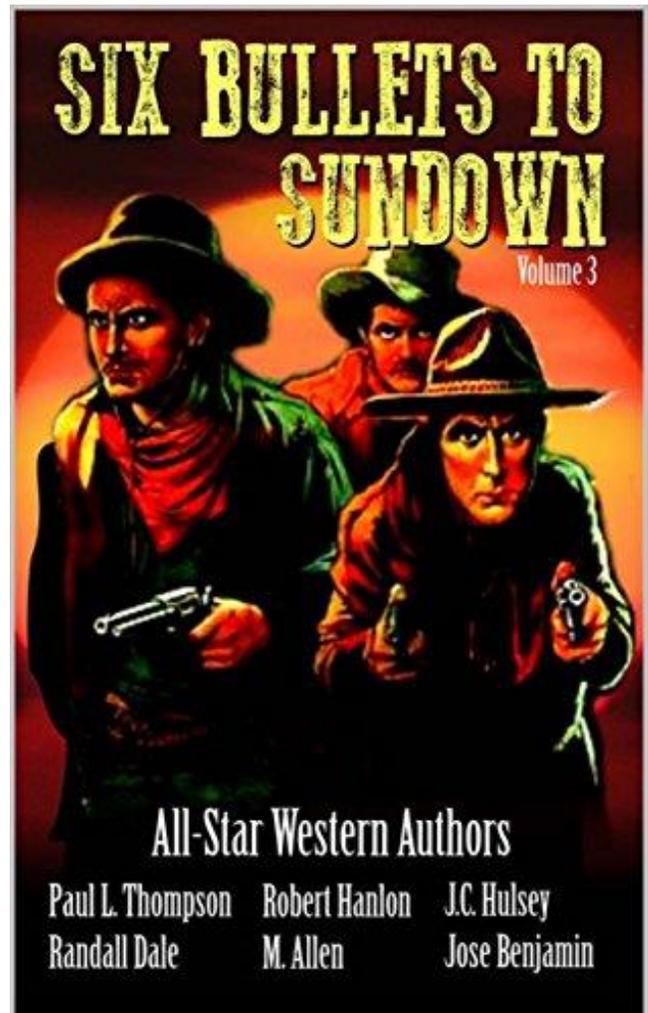
### **C-Bar: Volume One – Mark Baugher**

Already a major motion picture and now on the verge of being re-released in style by Dusty Saddle Publishing, this Baugher spectacular should please readers around the world. Not only does Baugher capture the feeling of the Old West—he captures the sentiment of the readers who will start this book and shed tears when it's over. Westerner rates "[C-Bar](#)" as a five-star read.

### **Six Bullets to Sundown: Volume Three – Various**

The third collection in the popular series puts action at the forefront with a great new short story from award-winning Western author Randall Dale. Selections from Robert Hanlon, J.C. Hulsey and Paul L. Thompson keep the trail warm

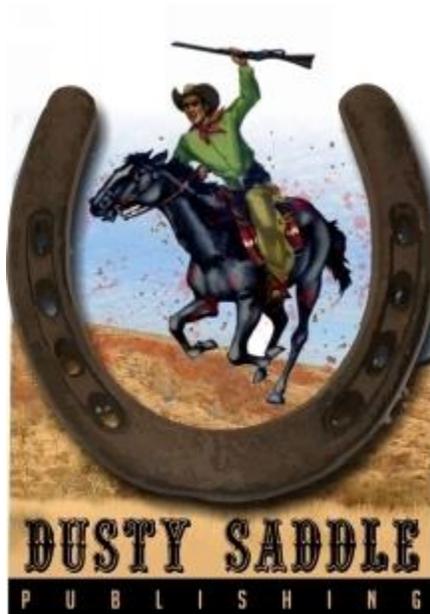
before the reader is visually assaulted by M. Allen with a stunning work entitled "Colton's Ambush." Westerner has picked "[Six Bullets to Sundown](#)" as their choice of the week with five stars.



To request a book review, or to have your book featured in an upcoming issue of Westerner, please email our friendly team of booklovers directly at [dustysaddlepublishing@gmail.com](mailto:dustysaddlepublishing@gmail.com)



For more information on how you might publish your Western, or if you know of a western author whom our audience might like to share, contact Nick Wale at [dustysaddlepublishing@gmail.com](mailto:dustysaddlepublishing@gmail.com)



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