

THE OUTLAWS ECHO PRESENTS

The Best of Western Culture
Westerner

DECEMBER 2017

**Vikki Carr on
Being True to
Family, Music,
and
Heritage**

**Operation Christmas
Child Brings Joy
and Hope!**

**Christmas Prayers and
Wishes From Around
the World**

**The Story of the Three
Wisemen in Full!**

**+Reviews and
Interviews!**



westerner

THE WESTERNER©

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TO KEEP THE WESTERNER© FREE FOR OUR READERS.





LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



*What I look like before my first coffee on
Christmas Morning.*

Dear Readers,

Christmas morning! It's hard for most people to imagine anything more glorious for millions of anxious children in the United States and throughout the world.

Yet, according to UNICEF, there are one billion children living in poverty around the world. It seems to me, the time of

year set aside, this should be our number one priority. In place of meaningless political infighting and constant bickering among our leaders, we should be on the forefront of a movement that brings real change to our country and the world.

Luckily there is an organization that is already on the vanguard of this change. Samaritan's Purse created Operation Christmas Child in 1993, and it has been the most widely accepted program of its kind worldwide.

The positive aspect of this program is that everyone can easily get involved. I'm just as guilty, as many people in my country, of overlooking real problems and focusing on my own concerns. The time of year shouldn't make a difference when it comes to the future of our world. It's no longer good enough that things are fine at home; we can all make a real gift of positive change for children who are suffering here and throughout the world. Who among them might be the one to cure Alzheimer's or finally bring the disparate powers of the world to the peace table?

We also have an introspective and thoroughly enjoyable interview with renowned singer, Vikki Carr. Our resident expert on music, Nick Wale, had a great conversation with this highly successful,

yet soul-searching performer that we think you'll absolutely enjoy.

It's Christmas! For children, the time is finally here once more. Some of us are concerned about the future of our country and this world. Many feel helpless to affect change and can't avoid the thought that their personal downward slide will continue.

Have heart! Some of our friends will share thoughts about the season and the future that will give you confidence and bring you joy in this season and the upcoming year. We'd like to invite you to share your own stories and prayers with us by emailing our staff at dustysaddlepublishing@gmail.com

Finally, we have all of the great features and Western book reviews that you've come to expect from our magazine. As we look forward to 2018, we hope that we can continue our service to Western readership by providing our periodical for free.

We'd like to thank all the people who participated with great interviews and content this year. Among them are: Sir Bernard Cornwell, Deana Martin, Charley Pride, Diane Franklin, Amanda Wyss, Alex Cord, Big and Rich, Bruce Boxleitner, Larry Manetti, Eric Bazilian, Tony Spera, Mike Pender, Frank Ifield, Connie Francis, Bobby Rydell, Cindy Morgan, and all of

you who contributed to our success this year. We wish you all a Merry Christmas and prosperous and healthy new year.

Peace on Earth!

BB

Please write us at dustysaddlepublishing@gmail.com with your comments and opinions.





LETTERS TO THE EDITOR:

Let's start this issue with a letter that we just don't know how to answer.

Dear Santa:

My name is Abigail and I am seven years old. Since I am only in the second grade, and don't write so well, my older sister Emily is helping me with this letter.

The problem is this. My brother Jack always seems to get more presents. I'm quite sure that I am more good than him. Why did he get a drone and an iPhone then? Sure, I got some good stuff but it seems like he's your favorite.

This year I'd like a hatchimal and some Legos. If you can't manage that then I'm going to stop writing to you.

Your friend,

Abigail M.

Abigail,

We appreciate the email and for the life of us can't understand why you sent it to the Westerner©. However, we have a good idea that Santa Claus is a subscriber and have printed your note, in its entirety, so that he has a chance to read it.

Dear Westerner,

My father is a seventy-two-year-old invalid and Vietnam War veteran. I'm not writing this to make you feel sorry for him, quite the opposite.

He gets visits from a nursing association to take care of him, keep him clean, and make sure he's fed and has taken his medications. Other people stop by all the time and the next door neighbor is a younger single man who often checks in on him and sits to play chess.

What I'm saying is that my father loves the Westerner. He began reading it when you came out with your first issue and

can't wait for the next one each month. You might think that he doesn't have the technical ability to read it, but my brother hooked up a keyboard to his television so that he can see the internet on the screen.

He loves Westerns and is reading all of the time. He hates television shows, with the exception of sports and Survivor. I want to thank you all for taking the time to publish the magazine. I know it's free so I figure you don't get paid much for doing it. I hope you will keep doing it for a long time.

Thanks!

Sandra A., Columbus, OH

Sandra,

I'm not quite sure how to respond to your letter, or that it needs a response. One thing I can say is that we at the Westerner© appreciate all of the servicemen and women who sacrifice so that we can be free.

This is a time of year when husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters may have to serve in some faraway place. Often times they are in peril. Your dad, and all of those people, are heroes.

Politicians keep talking about a better world, a place where all people can live in prosperity and harmony. That's a story that is getting more difficult to believe every day.

I hope your father will continue to enjoy the Westerner©. We put a great deal into publishing the magazine each month, and sometimes it seems like we are treading water. Your letter energized us once more. We thank you for that!

Dear Sirs,

My father got me into watching some of those old TV shows and Magnum, P.I. was one of them.

They all seem to have one central guy with other people supporting him. I guess they were topical at the time, but they seem redundant to me. Still, I enjoyed the interview with Larry Manetti.

It's too bad you guys couldn't have interviewed John Hillerman. I liked him the most on that show and I saw him in that old western *High Plains Drifter* on-demand.

If you're going to keep getting old stars, then why don't you get Zach from *Saved By the Bell*? At least he's somebody that someone in my generation might

remember. I mean, that was an old show but not too old.

Kim P., Williams, ND

If you'd like to tell us about your experience with the Westerner®, please send us an e-mail at dustysaddlepublishing.com

Kim,

I'm pleased to receive any suggestion on future interviews. We pride ourselves on the quality of our content and want to be sure, if you're taking the time to read, that we meet your expectations with the best possible subjects.





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Operation Christmas Child

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The Westerner© Top Ten Westerns for December

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History Corner with Fred Staff

Historian Fred Staff discusses Christmas in the Old West.

G. Michael Vasey

The Paranormal Corner: Dr. Vasey predicts the exact time, date, and place of Christ's return to Earth.

A Quick Note from W.M. Montague

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Market Bosworth, Nuneaton, UK
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Bruce G. Bennett General Partner
Nicholas Wale General Partner

Contact: dustysaddlepublishing@gmail.com

The Westerner© has roots in the United States and the United Kingdom, but our readership is throughout the world. With that thought in mind, what better poet would we ask for a Christmas Season special than TransAtlantic poetry creator Robert Peake?

Mr. Peake's poems have been recognized and awarded on both sides of the Atlantic and in multiple countries throughout the world. He is one of the great poets of our time, and the Westerner© is delighted to finally have his agreement to print one of his delightful creations.

Tingle

It lets you know your skin is there.

It reminds you of receptive hairs.

It tells you cold is an internal affair, that heat sometimes descends, that unseen creatures crawl the night, that pores can be particle and wave.

It lets you take a breath, then resumes its small assault on your epidermis, soft as steam, slick as melting butter, teen sweat in a darkened movie theatre.

Neither painful, nor quite ticklish, you want it to stop, but also continue blown belly button of an older sibling, uncle's favourite prank to make you squeal.

A lover's exhalation when they're spent, raising the body's landscape from within.



<https://www.robertpeake.com/>

NEWS OF THE BOOK WORLD



WITH JOHN WALT HOLMES

The latest news from the Western book world delivered directly to you via Westerner.

M. Allen Awarded Sales Award for Over One Million Pages Read of "Rifleman"

Dusty Saddle Publishing announced earlier this week that they would be awarding "The Rifleman" from M. Allen a sales award for pages read in excess of one million. Allen, who just broke into the top one hundred with "Wills Revenge" is looking likely to stack the hits up in 2018 with twelve scheduled releases.

The Wait for Fie Is Over

It was announced by Dusty Saddle Publishing that a new John D. Fie, Jr. Western would be hitting shelves in January. "Guns Along The Weary River" is a return to form for Fie and should push him back into the upper sales leagues.

Christmas Sales Boom for Western Fiction

Two of the major Western publishing houses, Outlaws Publishing and Dusty Saddle Publishing, have announced higher than expected profits for the early December period. "They just can't get enough of Thompson, Winkle, Hanlon and Watts," Outlaws Chairman J.C. Hulseley explained earlier this week. New titles from top selling Western authors are set for release throughout the month of December.

Watts Wins the Race for the Top 100

Million-selling Western author David Watts released his new Western novel, "A Gathered Peace," in November. The novel takes the story of Luke and Adeline in a new and exciting direction. Watts, who previously hit

the top spot on Amazon, has already broken into the top one hundred with this new release.

Hanlon Hits the Top Again!

"Two Guns For Yuma" from Robert Hanlon has become his eighteenth release to break into the top one hundred Western bestsellers. Hanlon, who scored his first number one with "Texas Bounty Hunter," is now set to release four Westerns per month throughout 2018.

Hitsville: Home of Paul L. Thompson

Multi-million seller Paul L. Thompson has broken his own record for most books in the Western top 100. In December he scored an unprecedented twenty-one books in the overall top 100. It's likely that he'll overtake his own record with four new books scheduled for release in December... He could conceivably end up with a mighty twenty-five books in the top one hundred.

The Reissue Wars Have Started...

Both Outlaws Publishing and Dusty Saddle Publishing have announced a series of new reissues to be released over the next twelve months. Box sets from C. Wayne Winkle, Paul L. Thompson and other bestsellers will hit the market as readers clamor for more product from cornerstone writing stars.

Brand New from Mister G.P. Hutchinson

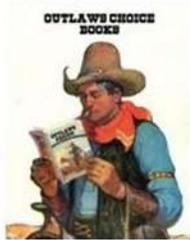
Top selling Western author G.P. Hutchinson will release his hotly anticipated sequel, "Strong Ambitions," which looks likely to break into the top 100. Tiny, yet prospering Benficklin, Texas wants a clean, respectable town marshal to safeguard their pristine community from the kind of riffraff that turned neighboring Santa Angela into a raucous string of blood-spattered saloons and bawdy sporting houses. Former Texas Ranger Emmett Strong seems to be just the man Benficklin's town fathers are looking for, once they're satisfied that his Chinese wife, Li, is "sufficiently civilized." This new adventure can be pre-ordered [here](#).

Staff Christmas Spectacular this Christmas Eve!

Fred Staff will be making a special appearance on the Christmas Eve episode of the Book Lovers radio show on Blog Talk Radio. Catch Fred Staff on December 24th 2017 at 3.30pm EST. Listeners can tune in here: www.ForBookLoversOnly.com

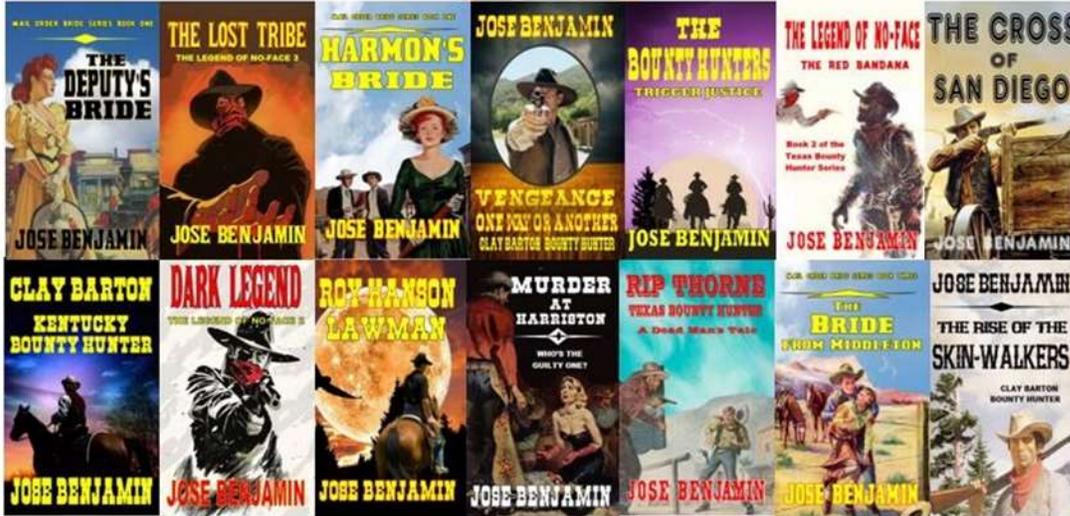
Baughner Breaks Records with Blockbuster C-Bar

Western author Mark Baughner is celebrating his third month in the top 100 with his first book "C-Bar." With thousands of pages read and copies sold, readers are hotly awaiting his next release. Word is that "The Widowmaker's Revenge" might be out in a few weeks.



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ANATOMY OF LOVE WITH VIKKI CARR



With Nick Wale, Editor, The Westerner©
Magazine

Vikki Carr is as relevant today as she was when she sang her first notes for Liberty Records. Her style is timeless, and her delivery is as pure as any popular singer. We caught up with Vikki before her concert in Los Angeles and talked about her current tour and plans for the future.

Nick: Hello.

Vikki: Hello, where are you located? In England?

Nick: Yes, when was the last time you were in England?

Vikki: It was in 2013 for a big fundraiser at the [London] Palladium. It was a fundraiser for cancer research. Incredible—they performed the show *42nd Street*. All of the theaters in London were involved in the fundraiser, and I was honored to have been invited to participate.

Nick: You're very popular, here in England. I heard your records quite a bit growing up.

Vikki: You could have gone all day without saying that. [Laughs along with Nick]

Nick: It's true, I listened to albums such as *Anatomy of Love*.

Vikki: *Anatomy of Love*? What a great album! It was great because it was funny. When we recorded it, we wondered what to call the album. Finally, we said, *Let's do songs about the anatomy*. I don't think it was my idea. It was probably some producer's, but a clever title anyway.

Nick: Well, you did two of them, didn't you? *Two Anatomy of Love* or two *Discoveries*?

Vikki: *Discovery One* and *Discovery Two*. I felt like a ship that was going into outer space.

Nick: Did you have a lot of fun working for Liberty Records?

Vikki: Being that it was at the beginning of my career, I loved everything about it. I loved the energy and going to all the radio stations – because in those days that's what you did. When I first went with Liberty they wanted me to be a country artist. I was not a country artist at that time. Then I got an invitation to

meet with the president of the company and I thought, *Oh, my, I'm getting my walking papers.*

The president sat across from me and said, "I'm from Joiner, AK, and it's obvious to me that you're not going to be a country artist. So we've decided we're going to make you our label's class artist."



That was how I got my start recording those albums.

Nick: Was the emphasis on making great albums or hit singles?

Vikki: What is the hook? What will people be humming? With me, I think it was listening to the lyrics. It's one thing for *Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons* to have a hit with *Can't Take My Eyes Off of You*. I sang *It Must Be Him*, which was much different. Everyone was humming *Can't Take My Eyes Off of You*, but you had to listen to *It Must Be Him*.

What was the hook of the song? Was it one line? A lot of the music today, for my taste, is very boring. Because there are no lyrics to speak of. It gets very boring to hear the same thing over and over. But that's the hook. People love singing along to a song that's easy to remember and "catchy."

Nick: Did you know *It Must Be Him* was going to be such a big hit?

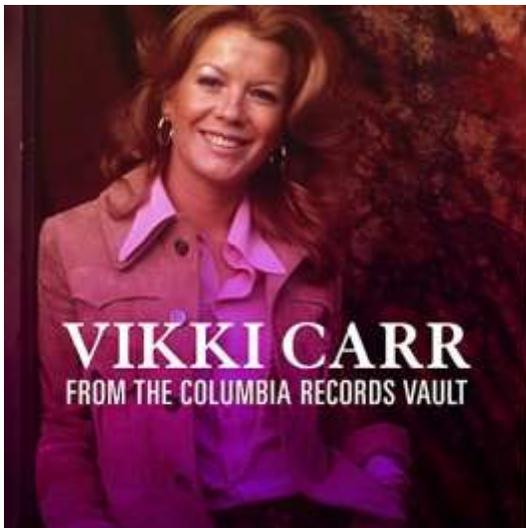
Vikki: From the audience's response, yes. I guess I was on the charts at the same time as the *Beatles* and other great artists of the era. But I couldn't perform it. I couldn't perform it in the United States, because it had the word "God."

I heard remarks like, can't you change the lyrics to *let it be him dear Lord*? I'm thankful to Arnold Mills, who was my manager at that time, who found the song and okayed what I did. He was also manager for Bobby Vee and some of the other great Liberty talent at the time. The song allowed me to challenge myself vocally, so the audience could hear the range of my vocal stretch on that song.

Nick: The first album I heard of yours was *Love Story*. What do remember about making *Love Story*?

Vikki: That was in the 1970s?

Nick: Yes, on Columbia.



Vikki: I was signed to Columbia because of all the hits I'd recorded. But at Columbia they tried to shape you into a cookie-cutter artist. Andy Williams, Johnny Mathis, we all had to do the same albums. We were covering everyone else's hits. How can you put your own identity to a song that's someone else's big hit?

That was the frustration, and I started to lose who I was to that point in my career. Liberty afforded me the opportunity to do so many things, like the big orchestra recordings at the beginning. Like *Color Her Great*, then *Discovery One* and *Discovery Two*, then we did *Don't Break My Pretty Balloon* and the *Bosanova*.

My first country album was with Liberty. There was more variety of things for me to do, and I was often surprised I could do them. They've released, at Columbia, what they call *The Lost Tapes of Vikki Carr*. Sounds like a Steven Spielberg movie. [Both laugh]

There was such a resurgence in my country recordings that, for the first time in my

career, I collected royalties. For me, it was interesting to have recorded in so many different styles of music. But my passion was trying to understand what the writer was trying to say and convey that to the listening audience. [Sings!]

Nick: You sound great. Just listening on the phone is lovely.

Vikki: [Laughs] It's all in the heart. [Sings again].

Nick: I've done many of these [interviews], and this is the first time someone sang to me on the phone. It's fantastic! None of the other singers we've had in the Westerner© has done that for me. It's wonderful!

You've done some Spanish records as well?

Vikki: I'm of Mexican decent but I was born in the United States. My grandparents, on both sides, were from Mexico. Guadalajara, Chihuahua, and Sonora. When I was first performing with a Mexican-Irish band they'd introduce me as, *Here she is, Carlita!* I'd walk out with my store-bought red hair and everybody thought I was Irish.



I wanted people to know there was more to Latin music than what they heard when they went to a Mexican restaurant. Maybe I was ahead of the time, in the 1960s, but I always sang one or two songs in each of my shows that explained my heritage. My real name is Florencia Bisenta Martinez Cardona DeLeon. [Both laugh]

Nick: I can't get my mouth to say that.

Vikki: I have to tell you that my dad wanted to know why I changed my name. I did it for no other reason except that's what people did in those days. When we started out, they said, "We've got to get you a name that people will remember."

So it came to be with Vikki. Then shortening Cardona down to Carr and adding the other "r." Then we went through all the spellings of the name Vikki. When I said V-I-K-K-I, they

said, "Nobody spells it that way." I replied, "That's the idea!"

Now it's commonplace to see those spellings, Nikki, Vikki, Rikki, all with the K-K-I. I've had people tell me, "I've named my daughter after you." I say, "OK."

So that was Spanish. I did have the chance to record *Quando*. Right before our call, I received the very sad news that my dear friend Jim Nabors passed away. He was so successful after his *Gomer Pyle* days. He wound up with his own variety show, and he was successful in every way. The perfect host. But when he sang with that legitimate operatic voice that he had, do you remember?

Nick: Yes, he made quite a few albums as well. Didn't he?

Vikki: Right! Then he covered *Quando Calienta El Sol*, but he did it in English.

Nick: *Love Me with All Your Heart*.

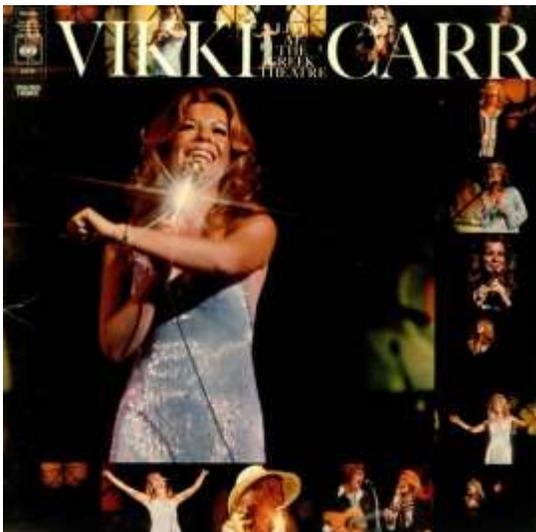
Vikki: Right! [Sings a few lines of the song.] I fought for the song in Spanish. I made a promise, to my father, that someday people will know me equally for my real name as my stage name. I made it part of my show. I talked about it with my audience, on interview shows on television, and it has come to pass.

I was nominated for *It Must Be Him*, and *Pen in Hand*, but never won. When I went to Columbia, and fought for the first all-Spanish album, the president of the company didn't think it was an important thing to do. I've

heard many times throughout my career that I was ahead of my time.

Now when I see Latin music worldwide, it makes me feel good. I hope that I had a small part in opening the door for that beautiful music.

Nick: If a young person asked you to pick the record most representative of your style, which would you recommend?



Vikki: Two, I think. One when I recorded live at the Plaza Hotel. The other would be *Live at the Greek*. Because I got to do the kind of music that I knew and love. I've never been known as a protest singer or activist. I've always tried to reach everyone and not isolate myself. My dad brought me up to be the best person I could be.

I was brought up to do everything with my heart. On the day I can't sing from the heart, I'll stop singing. Because my audience knows whether I'm real or not. It's been a tremendous source of strength for me over

these fifty-nine years I became an overnight success. [Laughs.]

Do you know what songs people love in Japan? My Spanish songs. I would get so emotional, at times, with my singing and look out in the audience and men and women would be emotional too. It's amazing that the languages are so similar. Everyone thinks it's an act. People ask me, "How is it that you can make yourself cry?"

Some of those things I could put my personal feeling into and become emotional. I run the gamut laughing to crying, and I don't know that to be good or bad.

Nick: Elvis loved your live performances, didn't he?

Vikki: Yes, he did, but who knew? I came from a very strict upbringing, and my father would never allow Rock-and-Roll to be played. I was raised on big band, Sinatra, and Mariachi music. My dad had a beautiful voice and wanted to be a professional. I didn't go out with boys, but anything that had to do with music was fine.

When I went on the road I was underage. I auditioned, and got the job, and thought, "Now what do I do?"

My father said, "I want you to take this opportunity."

I said, "You don't let me go out and now you're throwing me into the cold, cruel, world." Which, in essence, he was.

I didn't know anything because I'd been so sheltered. In retrospect, I'm thankful for the parents that I had and the family that I have. Am I a saint? Definitely not. Have I done things that I'm not happy about? Yes. But as I get older I'm thankful for the life and the family I have and for the strength to move forward.

Nick: Our issue is a traditional Christmas issue. And those words fit in nicely.

Vikki: What have we got? You can't pick up a newspaper or turn on the TV without something wanting to top the last terrible thing that happened. For me, the media all over the world has fallen into the trap. The standard reply is, "This is what people want to hear."

I've seen comedians who were very successful suddenly use profanity and change the way they do things. They say, "This is what people want." I reply, "So you're going to go along with people instead of being a leader and lifting people out of the gutter?"

Nick: Everything has deteriorated to the lowest common denominator.

Vikki: Exactly.

Nick: Things that used to be important are not considered to be important anymore. Some of the interviews we've done for the magazine can never be used. Because our audience would disregard us right away.

One quick thing, how will you be spending Christmas?



Vikki: I'll be with my family in San Antonio, although the majority of my brothers and sisters are in California where I am now. We're going to be doing a mariachi Christmas show. We'll be doing the Nutcracker Suite. I want people to know that mariachi can do classical music, they're classically trained, and it will be interesting to hear.

Then we'll have the quiet Christmas moment at the end. I've always tried to send my message. We have to understand that God gives us all a special gift. We don't all have to be singers. Christmas will be special for me. Many people thought I'd retired. The last few years have been very difficult for me, having been married to an incredible man and doctor.

He was suffering from dementia, and I took it upon myself to take care of him. I'd like to reach people with a message that says *take care of those you love but also take care of yourself.*

Nick: I'm sorry to hear that.

Vikki: Many people have gone through this. I know that many people in my audience have gone through this with their loved ones. I want to let them know that their life isn't over. This experience makes them stronger. I try to find the joy and peace in the experience.

Nick: I really have nothing to add. Just, thank you for this interview and sharing your experience.

Vikki: It came about so last minute. Normally I let Yvonne [my assistant] drive. She's such a blessing, but I wanted to drive to the airport. That's how you got the interview.

Nick: You do what you love, don't you? I really appreciate you putting it together at the last minute. I've seen you thousands of times on album covers, and to have the chance to speak with you has been great. Without ever meeting you, thousands of people and perhaps millions have a relationship with you through your music. I wonder how many times people hear you on the radio?

Vikki: It's funny... When they do the quarterlies and I get my royalties, I never got checks like this before.

Nick: What is your most played recording?

Vikki: I don't really know. It's funny that you can go on Pandora and ask for Vikki Carr music. Then they'll put a lot of other artists in too.

What I liked about England was anyone in a whole gamut of music could be number one.

Nick: My parents played all kinds of music, and I like all kinds of music.

Vikki: When I was successful with Latin music, there were a lot of other people recording in that genre. But when my American band went to Latin America, we got mobbed.

Nick: It must be amazing to go someplace and find they love your music.

Vikki: Someone told me I have to go to Egypt because my song *Can't Take My Eyes Off of You* was one of the biggest songs there. Who knew?



Nick: I hope you come to England soon.

Vikki: I wanted to move to England because no country gave me the chance, as a woman, that I received there. I know we've been talking a while, and Yvonne will kill me, but I have to end with one of the biggest hits in my life was about God. *It Must Be Him*.

Nick: Well, I am sorry for keeping you so long.

Vikki: I've enjoyed it completely. You've had everything from laughter to my tears.

Nick: It's been my pleasure.

THE TREMENDOUS IMPACT OF SAMARITAN'S PURSE OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD



Many Americans have seen the Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes, and a good deal of them have packed a box for a child they, most likely, will never meet. Since 1993, Samaritan's Purse has been collecting these unique gifts and distributing them to children in need throughout the world. The impact of this program is widespread, but what does it mean for an individual to give in this way?

The Westerner Magazine caught up with Mesfin Abera, Regional Director for the Mid-Atlantic Region, to ask a few questions on Operation Christmas Child and its impact on the world today. I don't believe that anyone who reads this article can walk away from this tremendous program. Here is our interview with one of the most successful

organizations reaching children of the world today:

Friday, December 1, 2017

Westerner: I appreciate you taking the time to speak with us today.

Mesfin: Thank you, and I appreciate your interest in Operation Christmas Child.

Westerner: Tell me a little about yourself and how you got involved.

Mesfin: I'm regional director for Operation Christmas Child, here in the Mid-Atlantic. Our region covers Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, DC. I got involved because I'm originally from Ethiopia, and I've known about Samaritan's Purse from their activity where I came from.

In addition to Operation Christmas Child, the Samaritan's Purse organization is involved in community development, disaster relief, and other projects around the world. It was my passion to be involved with that kind of organization so, after I moved to the United States about fourteen years ago, I joined the organization following graduation from college.

Westerner: You're from Ethiopia, but do you currently live in the United States?

Mesfin: Yes, I live in Maryland and our regional office is located in Columbia, MD.

Westerner: What's your program like today?

Mesfin: Operation Christmas Child involves the participation of many persons. We collect shoebox kits filled with school supplies, hygiene items, and fun toys, and deliver them to children in need throughout the world. We hope this shows God's love in a tangible way. We want to remind children who are living in a desperate environment that they're not forgotten. People are thinking of them, care for them, and also that God loves them.

The program started in 1993 here in the U.S. That year we collected about twenty-five thousand shoeboxes. Since then, we've collected nearly one-hundred and fifty million. We've sent them to over one-hundred countries.

We're in the middle of collection week and are currently processing those boxes to send them around the world. Following our humble beginning in 1993, we've become the world's largest Christmas partner of this kind. We're hoping to collect over eleven million boxes this year and send them to over one-hundred countries.



Westerner: The idea of a box—How has this idea maintained its viability?

Mesfin: Look at the number of children who live in challenging environments, around the world—those living in refugee camps or on the streets. Some of these children are living in orphanages, desperate to know that someone cares about them.

Think of them receiving a gift for the first time and understanding that someone has thought about them. That's a powerful occurrence. There's always greater needs than the shoebox gifts we provide. I've had many opportunities to go and hand deliver these boxes. There's never been a place where I've gone that we have more boxes than children.

The need is greater. We're hearing many stories of how these shoeboxes are having powerful impact in the lives of boys and girls who receive them.

Westerner: Can you share some of those stories?

Mesfin: Think of Jackie, who currently lives in Delaware. Jackie lived in an orphanage in Guatemala. She was given up by her young mother when she was only a few months old. At the orphanage, she shared a room with twelve other girls. Jackie didn't have much, but she learned to protect the few possessions she had.

One December, when Jackie was five years old, she was given an Operation Christmas Child shoebox gift. She cuddled the stuffed animal that was in the box and expressed the

emotion she felt for the person who packed that shoebox on that day. She felt loved and cared for by someone she didn't even know.



Finally, she had something she could call her own. One year later, she was adopted by a family in Delaware in the United States. She started packing shoeboxes so that a child might have the same experience she had when she received that shoebox gift. She felt loved and realized she wasn't left alone.

When we think of children in the U.S. receiving a gift at this time of year, it may not seem like such a big deal. For many children, throughout the world, this will be the first gift they ever receive. That why, for Jackie, this was so special an event.

I want to also share with you a story about Elena. She was eight years old when she and her sister were moved from a poverty stricken home to an orphanage in the former Soviet Union. When she was feeling totally unloved, someone handed her an Operation

Christmas Child shoebox gift. It was the first gift she'd ever received.

Inside the box there was a booklet. The booklet said that the Creator of the universe loved her, a story which seemed like a fairy tale at the time. Nevertheless, she began to pray that a family would find her and her sister. In 2004, her prayer was answered when a U.S. family made the decision to adopt the girls.

Today she tells the story of what her shoebox meant to her. It began a spiritual journey that is still cherished.

Westerner: The message is greater than the shoebox, and what's inside. The message is that there's a God who cares about them.

Mesfin: We want them to know that God loves them. They aren't forgotten by either the people who caringly packed the shoeboxes or the God of the universe. We want them to see this in a tangible way. That's why the shoebox gift is so important.



We want to send them new items. This is the reason we ask our donors to fill them up with good, new items that children can use.

Westerner: How important are donors to your organization?

Mesfin: Our volunteers and donors are the backbone of this organization. Right now, we have eighty-thousand people serving at eight processing centers around the country. We have over sixty-thousand volunteers who serve during national collection week, which is always the third week of November. Close to one-million donors will pack shoeboxes.

We have nearly ten-thousand volunteers who work to promote the program to communities year-round. Without those volunteers and donors, we don't exist. We're grateful to those people for making this program possible.

Westerner: How can people get involved?

Mesfin: Many ways. People can pack shoeboxes now, especially those near processing centers like the one here in the Baltimore-Washington area. There is also a center in Charlotte. If people live near one of those centers they can still pack boxes and bring them to one of those locations.

People can also pack shoeboxes on-line. People can go to <https://www.samaritanspurse.org/buildonline> and choose a child age and gender, and we will pack a shoebox for them. People can also volunteer at one of our processing centers. Interested men and women can find out more information about volunteering at <https://www.samaritanspurse.org/>.

There are opportunities to serve year round.

Westerner: When the boxes are packed and ready, how do you decide where they're distributed.

Mesfin: When they arrive in the participating country, there are volunteers ready to distribute them. We use trucks, trains, airplanes, helicopters, boats, elephants, and all ways of transportation to get those containers full of boxes to our volunteers.



We partner with local churches and groups who bring children to an event where they receive their shoeboxes. Just like the boxes are collected by volunteers, they are distributed by volunteers.

Westerner: Is there ever a danger to your people in countries where you distribute the boxes?

Mesfin: Our volunteers often encounter adverse conditions. There are some places that are easier and our people don't face many challenges, but we do run into difficulties. Sometimes it may be with customs or getting clearance for the

containers to enter a country. There are some challenges that we navigate.

We've been fortunate that many countries allow us to work freely to bring in the boxes. Those volunteers who work in countries do a great job of managing the process.

Westerner: What are your hopes for the future?

Mesfin: We want to continue to grow. We want to collect more shoeboxes each year. The continent Africa, where I come from, is home to four hundred thirty-five million children under the age of fourteen. If every one of the three hundred twenty million people in the U.S. packed a shoebox, we would not be able to give a box to each boy and girl in Africa.

People have a great opportunity to impact the lives of children living in desperate situations around the world.

Westerner: Wow.

Mesfin: That provided a good context, didn't it?

Westerner: It's difficult for someone who's not been to Africa to relate. How does someone, who lives in the United States of America, relate to the problems and difficulties of children who are suffering in other countries? We are so privileged to live here.

Mesfin: It's very difficult. Simple items that we take for granted, like a pencil, can make a difference for a child. That gift can get

them off the streets and go to school – or not. That can be the difference that changes the trajectory of their life and impacts their future. It's so easy for us to question the difference a pencil would make. It makes a big difference.



If a child has no school supplies, they may not end up going to school. Education is so important. Beyond reminding these children, some of whom have lost their parents in war and now they're living in an orphanage, that someone cares, we meet their physical needs today. They've seen so many terrible things and experienced people who have done horrible things to them and their families, and the gift they receive in that shoebox changes their lives today.

People wonder, *if I'm putting gloves in my shoebox, what if it ends up in Africa where there is no snow?* Then the box ends up in the hands of a small boy whose fingers are about to fall off because he goes into the lake every day and tries to pull a fishing net. Those gloves can save his hands and help him fish every day.

Things like that make a big difference in the lives of children who receive the gifts.

Westerner: All the bad things we see in the world today, the petty squabbles, the ridiculous talk of world leaders, and here you are reaching the people who will count tomorrow. What better way to show someone in desperate need that they're special and someone cares?

Mesfin: Absolutely right.

Westerner: What else, beyond what we've talked about, would you like to add?

Mesfin: I'd like to thank our donors and volunteers who year after year make it possible to reach millions of boys and girls living in grave situations. Our story is made possible because of those people. I'm pleased that you've taken the time to hear our story.

Westerner: I appreciate your time. It's a great story. If we reach one person who packs one more shoebox, then that's one child who'll have a gift this year.

Mesfin: One person can change the life of one child with a shoebox gift. We'll never know how many of those children, who've received a shoebox gift since 1993, are now impacting their communities. What we do know is that people who want to make a difference in the world right now can pack a shoebox and put it in the hands of a grateful child.

Westerner: Thank you, Mesfin.



CHRISTMAS PRAYERS AND MESSAGES FROM SOME TERRIFIC FRIENDS

We imposed upon some of our favorite people to write down their feelings at this celebratory time of year. We asked some for prayers and others for thoughts on the season and hopes for the future. The Westerner© staff wishes everyone a Merry Christmas and look to the day when hope for this world, and all people on Earth, will turn to peace.



Edward Marx is a renowned healthcare CIO and strategic leader for one of the most prominent healthcare organizations in the world.

In 2014, he wrote down some of his memoirs in the autobiographical book *Extraordinary Tales from a Rather Ordinary Guy*.

Anyone who knows Ed will tell you he is anything but ordinary. He's been an Iron Man for over twenty years and has won many competitions. I love to see his pictures from morning runs throughout the world.

And those are from all over the world, as Ed is an accomplished traveller who has seen amazing things and participated in fantastic adventures.

What makes him truly one of our favorites is his recognition of how God has blessed his life. There are many important issues on Ed's plate: family, health, the future of American healthcare, but none outweigh his devotion to the Lord of Creation.

The following are his poignant words for this Christmas season:

Christmas has deep layered meaning. First and foremost, it is the day we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. My faith foundation is predicated upon Jesus' birth some 2000 years ago, and it is

a miraculous event to be celebrated. My family treats the day as we would for any other relative's birthday, with a huge celebration and time of blessing. We focus less on material gifts and attempt to keep the meaning of Christmas sacred. Over the years we have saved Christmas Day specifically to visit hospitals and nursing homes to share the Joy of the day.

Christmas offers a time of reflection. While we should think deeply and act selflessly every day of the year, the season does remind us how we should live our lives on a daily basis. It is insufficient to be charitable with our resources but once per year or think of others in need only during the holidays. We are called to bring messages of hope and acts of service daily. Christmas provides a natural check point to remind us to be consistent in who we are and who we are called to be.

Christmas 2018 will be different for our family as our 5 children continue to become independent. Christmas Day will find us in Tennessee celebrating Christmas with our second youngest (Austin, age 20) who just left home to follow his music aspirations in Nashville. Since Austin can't be with us on Christmas we thought we would join him. A week or so prior, Simran and our youngest (Shalani, age 14) will visit hospitalized children in Cleveland as part of our friends "Virtual Santa" ministry. With iPads in hand, we will

bring Santa to these children "Live" from the North Pole!

We are excited about Christmas and the hope it represents for everyone. Despite the challenges of the year, we are reminded once again about our faith foundation, an opportunity for renewal and the blessing to give unto others.



When I asked Pastor Paul Toms for a Christmas Prayer, he was quick to agree. When I asked him for a short biography, I received a humble paragraph.

Paul has lived all over the world as the son of a renowned pastor who passed on the legacy of his work to his son. I met Paul when he became our church pastor in the late 1980s.

From the first, I could tell that he loved Christmas and brought many new ideas to the church's celebration. One of those was decorating the traditional tree with Chrismons, which were homemade decorations that were faithful to the true meaning of Christmas.

Paul shared his ministry with his wife of forty-seven years, the former Susan Mosher, and his two children. He has been an inspiration to our community as well as others in his 43 years of service here.

This is what he wrote:

Christmas Prayer

Almighty God and Heavenly Father,

With grateful hearts we come to you in this wonderful season of the year to express our deepest gratitude for the love and grace that sent your Son to this earth. We know that when the Word became flesh, it was not with tinsel and lights and multiple celebrations. Rather, in great humility with all personal rights and glory laid aside, He came as One rejected and scorned for the very purpose of dying in our place to reconcile us with you. In the midst of all our Christmas celebrations and gift giving, help us always to remember Who and what we are celebrating, and to give thanks for the greatest gift ever given to all. Bless us with a sense of Whose we are and Whom we serve, and with the anticipation of eternal praise and glory in His presence. For it is in the name of that same incarnate Savior that we pray these things,
Amen.

As a Christian family, our great joy and blessing and privilege over so many years has been to celebrate Christmas

together in the light of its eternal significance. Large family gatherings, or just my wife and me, the joy of the moment and occasion is there and ours to relish. Luaus in Hawaii, summer cookouts in Australia, large trees, small trees, no trees - all marvelous memories of happy times remembering what was accomplished for us in the coming of Jesus to this earth. I love this season, with all its trappings, as I recall to mind the gift of the Christ-child each time.

Paul Toms

I've known George Searfoss since 2001, when my wife and I began attending Hope Church in King of Prussia, PA. I found George to possess an amazing aptitude for ministry in our community and throughout the world.

He's the founder of Love Works which offers a miraculous outreach to the local area and attempts to help people of all kinds in our community. Those people don't need to be members of the church, they simply need to have a requirement that Love Works can fill. He describes Love Works as a ministry that helps churches develop programs that demonstrate the love of Jesus in tangible ways to their neighborhoods.

George is pastor at Hope Church and also fulfills the job of chaplain for our police and fire departments. But his

ministry doesn't end at home. He's accompanied groups from church in ministries outside the United States. In one moving picture, I remember him praying with a group of people in West Africa. His faith in God and his devotion to people is contagious.

He's been married for twenty eight years and has three children. Here is his wonderful contribution to our Christmas issue:



My Christmas Prayer by: George Searfoss

My favorite Christmas song is this little lullaby, called "You Gotta Get Up (Christmas Song)" by the late Rich Mullins. The lyrics of the song are as simple as the tune but they speak volumes to me. This song is about the anticipation that comes with Christmas morning...

*"I thought Christmas Day would never
come
But it's here at last so mom and dad the
waiting's finally done
And you gotta get up ~ you gotta get up ~
you gotta get up
It's Christmas morning
Last night I heard reindeers on my roof
Well you may think I'm exaggerating but I
swear I'm tellin' you the truth
And you gotta get up, you gotta get up, you
gotta get up
It's Christmas morning
Did my sister get a baby doll? Did my
brother get his bike?
Did I get that red wagon the kind that makes
you fly?
Oh I hope there'll be peace on earth
I know there's good will toward men
On account of that Baby born in Bethlehem
Did my sister get her baby doll? Did my
brother get his bike?
Did I get that red wagon the kind that makes
you fly?
Oh I hope there'll be peace on earth
I know there's good will toward men
On account of that Baby born in Bethlehem
Mom and Daddy stayed up too late last
night
Oh I guess they got carried away in the
Christmas candlelight
And you gotta get up, you gotta get up, you
gotta get up
It's Christmas morning
And you gotta get up, you gotta get up, you
gotta get up"*

If you are like me you remember vividly the anticipation that came with

Christmas morning. You couldn't wait to tear into the gifts under the tree. Did you get the gifts you had written down on your wish list? Would there be any surprises on Christmas morning?

When Jesus was born, he was the gift on which the world was awaiting. Jesus' birth was not only the ultimate gift because it brought salvation but it also allowed us to have an ongoing relationship with God. We can now enter into his presence and talk to him anytime.

So, my Christmas prayer for us is as follow... *Thank you, Jesus for leaving heaven to be a baby born in Bethlehem. Thank you for giving us good will toward men. Thank you for giving us access to you at all times. May we be as excited to spend time with you as a child is on Christmas morning. Help us to demonstrate your love to the world every day in tangible ways. Amen.*

George Searfoss

THE TRANS-SIBERIAN ORCHESTRA PUT MAGIC BACK INTO CHRISTMAS



By JL Thomas

Four PM, December the fourteenth, in the year 2012. No seat exists in the Wells Fargo Center, Philadelphia, PA, and the atmosphere is so electric that it's palpable. There's nothing that can prepare someone for what's about to happen. All of the hype, the anticipation, congeals in a single moment when the lights go down.

Then they explode into a phantasm of music and special effects. Billboard ranks The Trans-Siberian Orchestra as one of

the greatest live acts of the century. But the story began in 1993 when rock composer and lyricist Paul O'Neill had the idea to create a show around Christmas that incorporated light and sound in a way that no one had previously conceived.

It centers around the music, but the theme is pure Christmas. O'Neill used his music industry contracts to bring top guitarists Al Pitrelli, Chris Caffery, along with drummer Jeff Plate and bassist Johnny Lee Middleton into the act. But it didn't stop there. Trans-Siberian Orchestra features some of the best keyboardists, string players, and vocalists on the planet.



If you love rock and roll, and you love Christmas, don't die before seeing TSO. Much of what they do is make old classics new. It's amazing how songs like O Come All Ye Faithful, What Child Is This, and The First Noel lend themselves to adaptation. Backed by one of the most talented group of musicians active today, and lit by the most amazing

special effects and laser show to date, TSO's performance is nothing less than legendary.

Most of us, who are true TSO lovers, remember when we first heard Christmas Eve in Sarajevo. From the initial flowing strains of the cello strings to the last squeal of guitar, this song rocked like never before. O'Neill stated in an interview that the song was about an old man who'd been a virtuoso cello player in his youth. When he became elderly, he returned to his bombed out city. Instead of hiding in the bomb shelters as explosions wrecked destruction all around, he climbed to the top of the rubble and played Christmas songs on his cello.



Imagery such as this is essential to the TSO live presentation. On December 14, 2012, my wife and I were amazed by the presentation of Lost Christmas Eve. Earlier that day, the country had been

stunned by the massacre of innocent children at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, CT. It was such a tragic event that we considered returning home and mourning with the rest of the world.

Faith is a funny thing because you sometimes find it in the strangest places. Though I'd heard their music, I didn't totally understand the message of TSO. Before the performance was over, their message was like a balm to my soul. Without being too blatant about it, they put Christ back into Christmas. And that message is one many people would like to hear every day.

What can you expect if you attend a TSO concert? You can expect to be thoroughly entertained. Sure, if you love the music you won't be disappointed. But you get more than just the fantastic rock and roll, you'll get a feast for the eyes. Platforms elevate performers high above the audience as lasers strobe the entire venue. Fire, strobe lights, and mist combine to provide an atmosphere that sets the stage for genuine magic.



When I say genuine, I mean it. Attending a TSO concert allows a person to become a part of a special and magical moment apart from the stress of daily life. You become part of the moment, lost in the performance. In the end, everything seems better for a long while.

With all the good often comes the bad. This was the case, earlier this year, when Paul O'Neill was found dead of a drug overdose in his hotel room in Tampa, FL. Often times we overlook the personal trials of people who strive to bring us the most joy. In the case of Paul O'Neill, his legacy will long survive his tragic end.

TSO continues to tour in 2017 with the themed performance *The Ghosts of Christmas Eve*. A portion of the gate for every show is donated to a local charity. I urge anyone who truly loves rock and

roll and can't get enough of Christmas to attend a TSO performance this year. Bring back a real feeling, a feeling of Christmas.



JL

WHO WERE THE WISEMEN?



By Bruce Bennett

Before I begin, the reader must understand that this is not a scholarly paper. If anything, much of what I write is open to interpretation. The following is more to stimulate thoughts of who the first gift-givers of Christmas were and what motivated them.

My interest in the Wisemen began as a child. No book of the Bible, outside of Matthew, mentions them and that gives pause to Bible scholars. The very reason behind four gospels is to show how each supports the other. Though the story is slightly different in the Gospels, each one mostly contains the same material.

Some scholars believe that Matthew Chapter 2 is a metaphor for the journey all Christians must undergo to find God's gift to the world, the Christ. I've studied the information long enough to believe it to be a literal interpretation of an actual event that took place around the year one. If that's true, then who were the Wisemen?

Events are such that its almost certain the Wisemen didn't show on Christmas Eve as many greeting cards might portray. The Bible tells that the only visitors to the actual birth of Christ were shepherds who were watching their flock by night. Angels appeared to the lowest of society at that time and invited them to the great event.

This brings a primary question to mind, "How could people miss such a world-changing event?" It's almost certain that Old Testament scholars could estimate the time and place of Jesus' birth. This is evident from the Wisemen's visit to Herod and the subsequent answer his scribes provided. So why didn't the birth get more fanfare?



Biblical scholars have often used the word "magi" to describe the visitors from the east. This would imply that they were practitioners of Zoroastrianism or something close to it. In the past, we've been given the idea that these "three" men were waiting in some observatory, watching the stars to determine the exact moment of the birth. This is probably wrong.

It is more likely that one king, from the east, had a scholarly interest in Jewish writing which combined with a scientific approach to the heavens. Many religions felt that earthly events were revealed in the stars, and we know astronomy was an established science at the time. Though there are many likely candidates, the Wiseman we know as Caspar is more than likely the Parthian king Gondophares.

Much of what historians know about this time comes from coins and artwork. Much of this artwork has been destroyed and the fragments that are left offer an incomplete picture of the time. However, King Gondophares is a very good candidate for one of the Wisemen for a number of reasons. If we go down that path, one glaring possibility begins to take form - they didn't know each other.

If that's true, who were the other Wisemen? There's no real way of knowing what they looked like, but tradition tells us that one had dark skin. Going on that theory alone, the most likely candidate would be a man of nobility from the region west of Africa, on the Arabian Peninsula, called Saba. The purpose in choosing this location over other likely candidates is the ties that Saba had to the Mediterranean mid-east.



Though I could never be sure, I've long suspected that a prince or person of nobility left Saba in the years before the birth of Christ over some kind of political turmoil. War was common among the kingdoms and treachery abounded. There were many kings and kingdoms throughout the eastern Mediterranean and mid-east. They were playing their own *Game of Thrones*.

Depending on how our likely "prince" left his homeland, he would have been interested in building an army of his own and with that purpose in mind would need wealth. I've long proposed that this member of the triumvirate headed northwest to the legendary city of Ubar. The city was a trading center that was known for its elaborate frankincense garden.

It may be that I want to throw additional mysticism into the story, or that traveling to Ubar simply makes sense in the first step to gathering wealth from trade in that region. The city was in what is called today the Empty Quarter of Saudi Arabia. No modern ruins are extant to tell us more about the fabled trading center. In or around the year 40 AD, the entire place was swallowed by the desert.

From Ubar, our prince would have likely made his way up the peninsula to copper mining facilities around the Red Sea. This would have afforded him the opportunity to trade valuable frankincense for bronze weaponry. Though steel was available at this time, it was very uncommon in the use of arms manufacturing.



Now, loyalists armed and ready for a fight, the prince would have gone looking for allies. Aretas IV, king of Nabataea, had a tentative truce with the biggest *Game of Thrones* player in the region, Caesar Augustus. It may have been that Nabataea was simply too much of a reach for the Roman legions at the time, who were having difficulty squelching Jewish uprisings in Palestine.

Aretas IV had a land dispute with Herod the King, which was the catalyst for a long and bloody war along the Nabataean western border. Herod's unlikely alliance with Cleopatra of Egypt forced the Nabataean king to relinquish a good deal of his western land. The king was proud and, by reputation, had a short temper.

He was also based in the desert city of Petra, which was central to trade between the Orient and the Mediterranean. Caravans would have stopped regularly as the city marked the halfway point in their desert crossing. When our southern prince, let's call him Balthasar, reached Petra he found a large caravan heading west.

The odd thing about this caravan was that it was not specifically looking for trade but searching for something even more intangible - a king. The Parthian king would have been an interesting contact for Balthasar and one he'd have surely made while in Petra. When he heard the story about the new king it would have intrigued him. What better ally than a king foretold in ancient scriptures who would come to rule the world they knew?

Balthasar and Gondophares made their alliance at Petra. They most certainly went to Aretas and told him of their plans. Given his recent disagreement with Herod, he would have been reluctant go to Judea. Instead, he provided the third member of our royal trio. That person has been come to be known as Melchior.



Melchior was almost certainly a son of Aretas IV and prince of Nabataea. If so, why would the king send him into the lair of an enemy that might prove to mean sure death? The reason is simple—he was expendable. Keep in mind my earlier statement, that treachery was commonplace in courts of the day. Melchior served two purposes:

The first purpose was a possible liaison with a powerful and new king who might be a threat to Herod. The second, and more insidious, was the possibility Aretas wanted to rid himself of the boy. Whether another successor was favored, or something about Melchior was amiss, it's more than possible that the king was knowingly sending his son to die.

So our three Wisemen are: Gondophares the Parthian king; Melchior, successor to the throne of Nabataea; and Balthasar, deposed prince of Saba. There may have been more. We think of three kings because of the song, but the Bible doesn't indicate how many arrived nor the size of their entourage. It

simply records the gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

The famous star pointed them west and their journey more than likely took them over the mountains into Palestine. A large army would have been difficult to move and threatening to the king in the next land. It might have been easier to leave the bulk of their caravan in Petra and move west with a smaller and more mobile group.



As such, when they arrived at the walls of Jerusalem, they were perceived more as a curiosity than a threat. However, when word spread they were looking for a king other than Herod, they immediately were granted an audience at the Citadel. It's during this time that the town of Bethlehem was identified as the most likely birthplace of the new king. Why Herod didn't join them is beyond understanding. Bethlehem would have been only a two-hour ride, or less, from where he sat.

Perhaps he was simply being cautious with the newcomers and interested to see whether they had an ulterior motive in his country. They were certainly not welcome,

that's clear. The group turned south for Bethlehem, a place they must have surely bisected on their journey to Jerusalem. Why they didn't make inquiries in that town is not recorded or understood. Had they done so, Herod wouldn't have been alerted to the fact that Jesus was born. This idea is almost unfathomable.

Matthew was a tax collector. He was born and raised in the same region as Jesus. He may have known the story as a youth. He may have even seen the wise men, or their entourage, as they traveled to or from their destination. The infanticide that followed their visit most definitely affected him. There was no family in that region Herod's terrible edict wouldn't have touched.



Tax collectors of the time went to school to apprentice for their trade. The job was highly sought and lucrative. Only the most intelligent and forceful men were chosen. In Matthew's case, he might have been in Rabbinical studies before making the change. Tax collectors were outcasts among the Jewish people and traveled in their own society.

Because of the need to quickly record goods for taxation, they learned a common

shorthand that allowed them to transcribe and record taxes collected later. This afforded the opportunity to cheat the merchant as well as Rome. The latter was not a negative concept for most Jews; the former was abhorrent among the people.



Needless to say, when it came time to record Christ's own words, the tax collector Matthew was the perfect choice for scribe. We like to believe the man to have been honest and forthright in his business, whether that was true is beyond certainty. What we do know is that the Gospel of Matthew is the truest recording of Christ's words.

With that in mind, and his goal of scribing an accurate accounting of what he witnessed, Matthew would have certainly included the visit of the kings he remembered as a child. Whether he was a first-hand witness, or heard of the visit through common lore, he felt the story important enough as he laid the groundwork for his gospel.



There you have it. While reading Hans Holtzer's *Star in the East*, I came across an interesting fact that archeologists have been wrestling since Christ's death. The Parthian king, Gondophares, appears minted on a coin with two other riders. That, in itself, is not strange. What is unusual is what he holds in his hand – the cross.

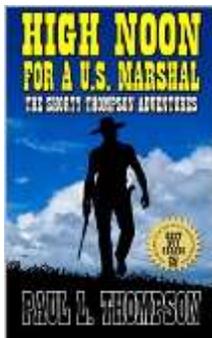
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THE WESTERNER © TOP TEN FOR DECEMBER

The editors thank our readers for the great response to last month's top ten list. Some of the great books are climbing the list and other new entries are reader favorites.

Enjoy the top ten for December!

Here are the Western top ten as voted by you, our readers:

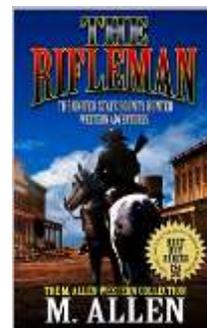


1. "High Noon for a U.S. Marshal" is another winner in a line of great books by renowned Western writer, Paul Thompson. Marshal Shorty Thompson has his hands full again when tracking down robbers who made way with a family's treasures while they were journeying to San Francisco. High Noon is chock full of all the great Western flavor that have made Thompson's books a favorite with readers. The book is available

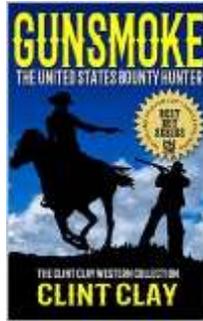
from Dusty Saddle Publishing in several formats. Click on the picture for more information.



2. "Ned Cassidy's Surprise" is a new entry from author C. Wayne Winkle. Ned is offered a bounty hunter job by a local sheriff when he brings in the body of a notorious killer. Winkle is an author who has a good following with Western readers, and it's no surprise this book has jumped in at number two in December.



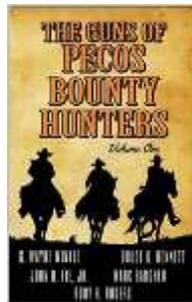
3. "The Rifleman" from M. Allen continues to fly high at the number three position. Readers will find a hot story line mixed with a great Western. People are finding new author M. Allen, and the reviews have been positive.



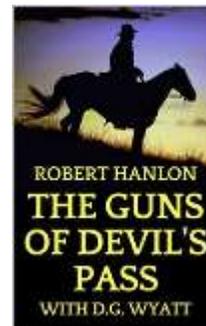
4. Another new entry in the December top ten is "Gunsmoke" by Clint Clay. This is another great book about bounty hunters and Western heroes. Clay has a writing style that most of our readers cotton to. This is a good read with plenty of interesting characters that will make you want more. Pick up a copy of Gunsmoke by clicking on the picture above.



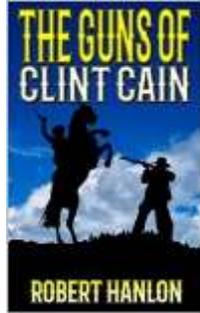
6. Coming in at six is the favorite, "C-Bar", by Mark Baugher. This book is not only in print but has been made into a feature film. Baugher is one of the hottest authors on the Western charts this year, and with great writing like this, we expect more of him in the upcoming year.



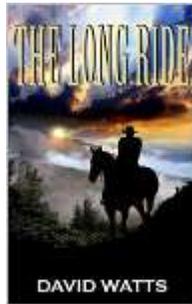
5. Coming in at number five is the new collection "The Guns of Pecos Bounty Hunters Volume One." With offerings by sought after authors like John Fie, C. Wayne Winkle, and Mark Baugher, this book promises to be one of the hottest of the end of 2017. It's a great pick-up for the Christmas stocking of your Western reader.



7. Robert Hanlon teams up with D.G. Wyatt to enter yet another great Western into our top ten. "The Guns of Devil's Pass" captures all the great adventure of bestsellers like "The Guns of Clint Cain" and "Crooked Creek." This venture is the first time the two favorites have been paired together and promises to be the kind of story that will have readers demanding more from them.



8. Robert Hanlon's "The Guns of Clint Cain" continues to be a perennial favorite in our top ten. Sales have been heavy for this widely read author, and this book should be on the shelf of every Western enthusiast.



9. New to westerns, David Watts is fast becoming one of the most widely read authors in this genre. "The Long Ride" is his

second book, following the unbelievable success of "The Guns of Pecos County." Watts' descriptive and gripping writing style really puts the reader into the action. "The Long Ride" is a strong entry into our top ten and proves that Watts is here to stay.

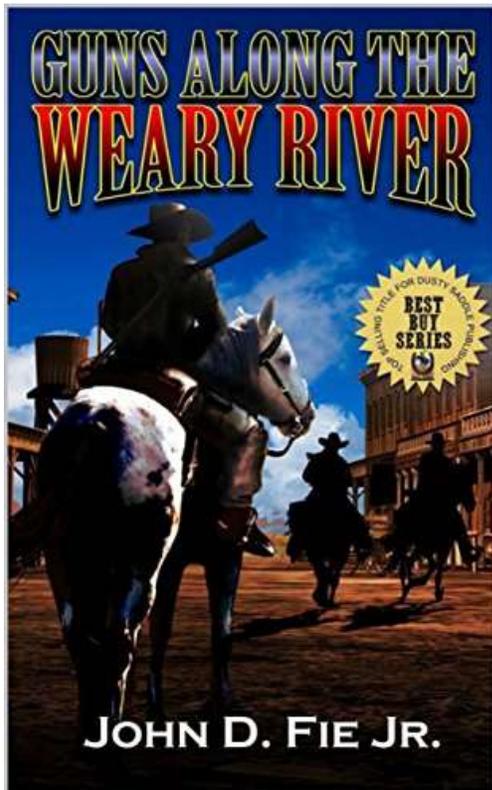


10. Rounding out the top ten is the second entry by new author, M. Allen. Once again, this steamy Western will satisfy the most particular reader. Full of great Western action with a dab of Shades of Grey, "Will's Revenge" will appeal to both male and female readers.

Send your favorites and comments to dustysaddlepublishing@gmail.com. We want to hear from our readers.

REVIEW CORNER

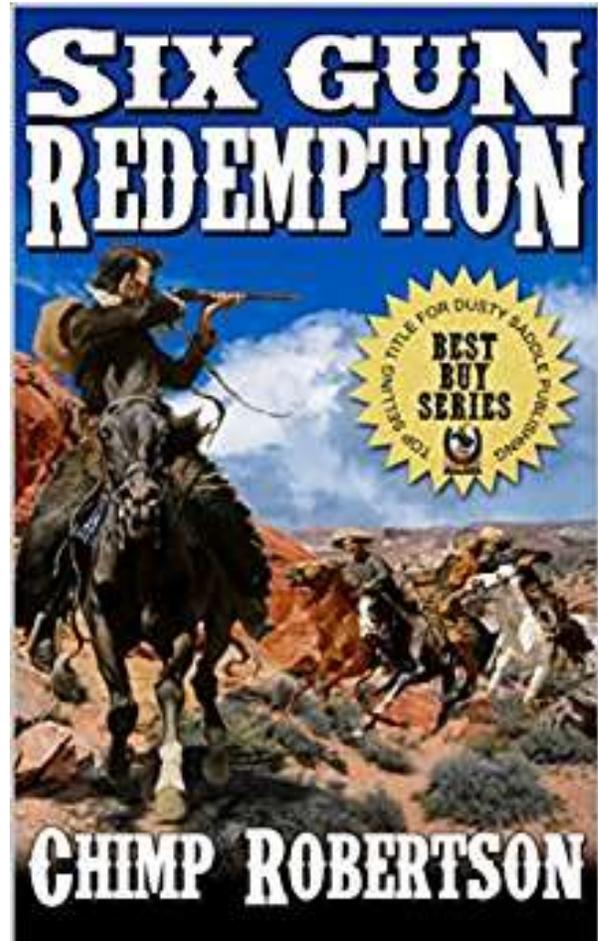
WITH LON HAMILTON



"Guns Along the Weary River" – John D. Fie Jr

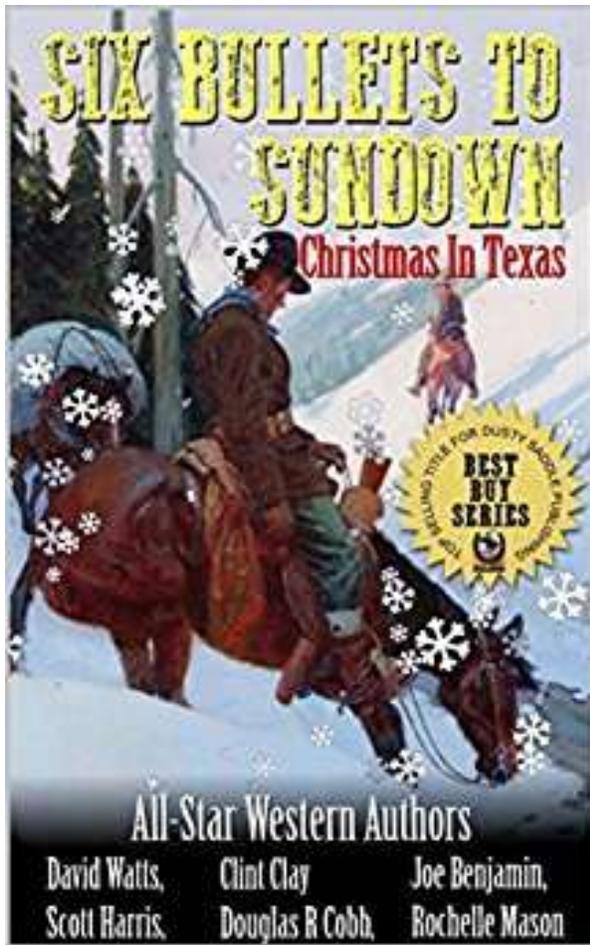
The new one from John D. Fie, Jr. is a riveting adventure that touches upon many of the problems prevalent in society today. Is there a lot of gunplay? Yes. Is the writing the best Fie has ever done? Without doubt. Will you ever get the chance to visit the West like this again? As long as this book is in print, the perfect journey to the West will be available.

Westerner magazine rates "[Guns Along The Weary River](#)" as a four-star read.



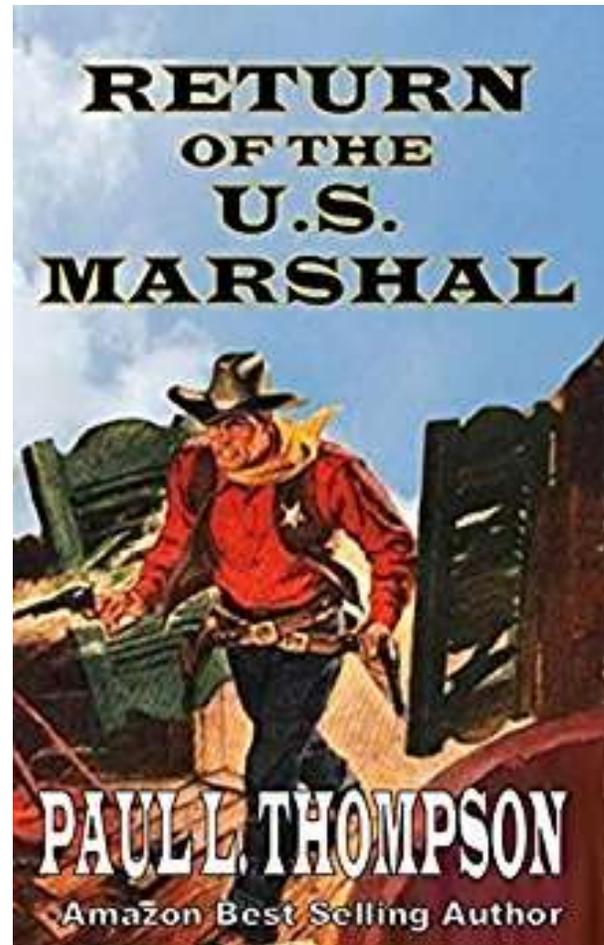
"Six Gun Redemption" – Chimp Robertson

The new release from popular Western author Chimp Robertson is a winner through and through. Not only has Chimp Robertson turned out his best book so far... he has also managed to do it without changing an already popular style. This new one is an adventure worthy of any self-respecting Kindle. Westerner magazine rates "[Six Gun Redemption](#)" as a five-star read.



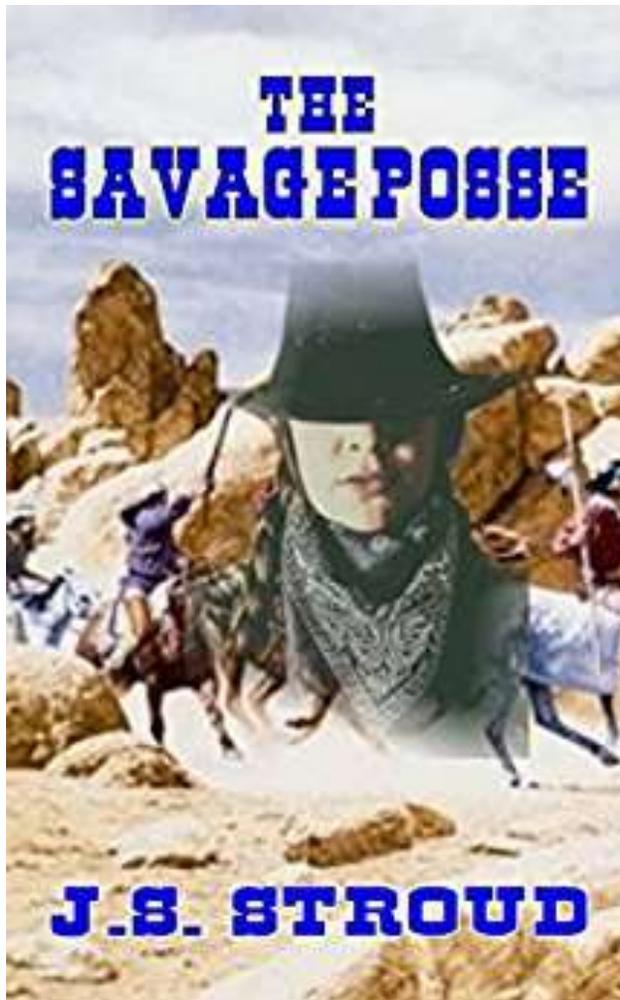
**“Six Bullets to Sundown: Christmas in Texas”
– Various**

Six great Christmas-themed stories from six of the best Western authors of today. “Christmas in Texas” will give you all the Christmas goodness that you will need from your Kindle this month. If you want the perfect Christmas gift for the cowboy in your life, you’ll love this latest DSP offering. Westerner rates [“Six Bullets to Sundown: Christmas in Texas”](#) as a five-star read.



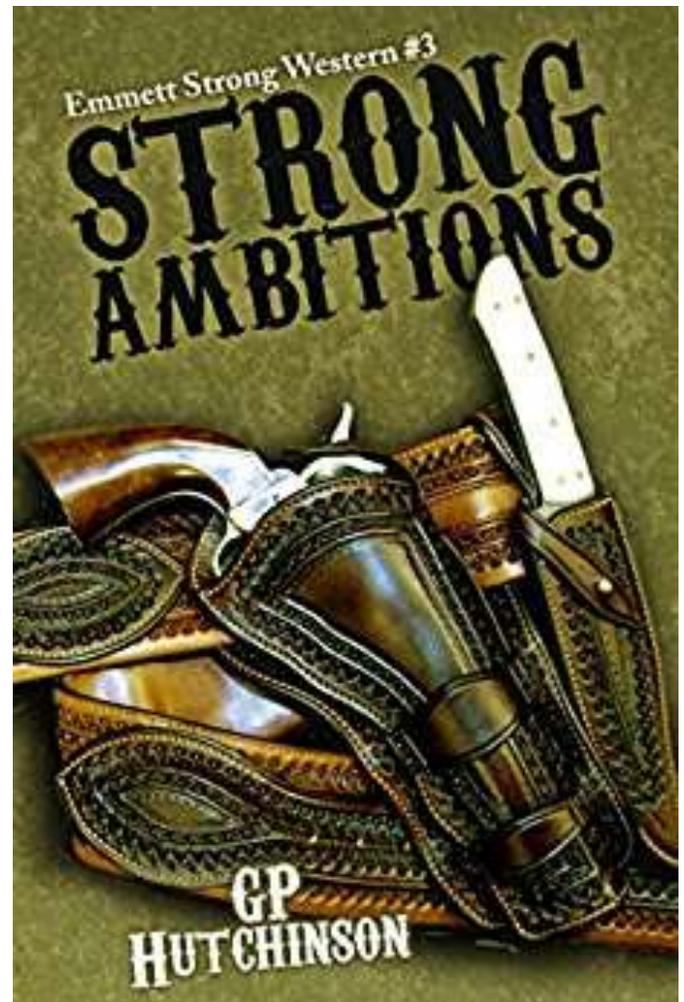
“Return of the U.S. Marshal” – Paul L. Thompson

The latest Paul L. Thompson release from Outlaws Publishing says a lot about the talents of Paul L. Thompson. Not only has he written a bestseller with each new book—but he has a catalog that readers seem to be addicted to. What makes Thompson so popular? It’s his writing style. A completely unique, readable, enjoyable style that seems to appeal to every Western fan in the world. This new set pulls together his first four books. All are must-reads! Westerner rates [“Return of the U.S. Marshal”](#) a four-star read.



"The Savage Posse"— J.S. Stroud

A recent signing for Outlaws Publishing. This is the latest release from J.S. Stroud—a writer who is showing a lot of promise for the company. Not only is his writing style compelling—his story ideas are second to none. If you want to read a totally original idea written in a very easy-to-read style, you will want to grab "The Savage Posse." Hopefully more books will come from this great new author. Westerner rates "[The Savage Posse](#)" as a four-star read.



"Strong Ambitions"- G.P. Hutchinson

The mighty pen of G.P. Hutchinson has been working lately on what could be described as his best Western. This is "Strong Ambitions," which is the third book in a popular series that has already spawned a number one bestseller. Filled with gunplay, great tense writing and some fantastic visions of the Old West, this one would be the Western to read over all others over the Holiday period. 'Nuff said! Westerner rates "[Strong Ambitions](#)" as a five-star read.

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

**HERE
COMES
SUMMER!
COSTA RICA
THE
ADVENTURE OF
A LIFETIME!**

BY DENNIS HAMBRIGHT



Costa Rica! The name alone conjures up images of adrenaline-filled tropical

adventure. Lush jungles teeming with colorful toucans, chattering monkeys skittering through the treetops, and all manner of exotic animals just waiting to be discovered. Roaring whitewater rivers rushing down through deep valleys. Iconic volcanoes dominating the horizon. Seemingly endless miles of emerald green rainforests. I mean, really, who hasn't dreamed of experiencing the adventure of a lifetime right in the big middle of it all?

If tropical adventure is on your bucket list, then Costa Rica is absolutely the place for you!

You might be wondering why I've zeroed-in on Costa Rica as the perfect spot for catching that adventure of a lifetime. I mean, after all, there are lots of great travel destinations where adventure can be had, right? Well, there are, but I've spent a lot of years traveling all over the world, and I can tell you from personal experience, Costa Rica is the perfect location for safe, logistic-friendly, adventure travel.

If you've read my #1 Best Selling travel guide, *Day by Day in San José, Costa Rica*, then you already know that I'm not a fan of muddling through a lot of dates and statistics. Like I always say, there are a hundred other places you can get all that information, and that's just not my bailiwick. But there are a few important details we should consider that will help us get things kicked off on the right track as to why Costa Rica is such a perfect destination for your adventure travel.

- Since the 1990s, Costa Rica has been widely regarded as the 'Poster Child of Ecotourism' throughout the highly competitive travel industry. Without a doubt, Costa Rica has it all - mountains, jungles, rivers, beaches, and every other adventure-laden venue that you might be looking for.



- Costa Rica has dedicated more than 23% of the country's entire land mass to national parks and recreational areas. That's the largest percentage of any country in the world that's been officially committed to being protected in that way. I guess you can say that it's pretty clear that Costa Rica is devoted to preserving the natural resources needed to maintain an ongoing diverse ecotourism wonderland.

- More than 2,000,000 tourists a year come to Costa Rica. That's a lot of visitors for such a small country, so there must be something pretty special that not only keeps tourists coming, but keeps them coming back time and time again.

- Approximately 50% of all visitors who come to Costa Rica engage in some type of ecotourism activity. With its rich biodiversity and immense ecosystem, Costa Rica is the world leader in eco-adventure travel.

Bottom line: Costa Rica is ground zero for adventure travel. Bingo! That's us, baby! Seekers of heart-thumping, adrenaline-pumping experiences that you'll remember for the rest of your life!

Now, don't get me wrong. I know I refer a lot to adrenaline-pumping adventures, and that might lead some of you to think that the only kinds of activities to be had are ones that are dangerous, or just for thrill-seeking Tarzan wannabes. That's absolutely not the case. There's something for everybody in Costa Rica.

Adventure is all a matter of perspective, and whether you're 18 or 80, you can find something that's just perfect for you. For some travelers, that might mean shooting down a Class IV rapid on

one of the top whitewater rivers in the world. For others, it might mean leaning over the bow of a sleek catamaran as it skims out over the waves towards one of the islands. For others still, it might mean a hike up a mountainside to gaze off into the crater lake of a majestic volcano, or snapping photos of a waterfall cascading over a two-hundred foot cliff.

What I'm getting at is, no matter what your level of interest or physical ability might be, there's an adventure to be had in Costa Rica that's just right for you.

Top Five Types of Adventure Tours

There is an almost endless list of different types of adventures that you can experience in Costa Rica, but in order to narrow that down just a little, here is a list of my favorite five to help get you started toward finding that life-changing experience you've always dreamed of:

1) **Whitewater Rafting:** Costa Rica has a wide variety of exciting rivers for fans of whitewater rafting, but I'm going to tell you from personal experience,

hands down, Rio Pacuare is absolutely the place you want to go. Even though Rio Pacuare is one of the top whitewater rafting rivers in the world, you don't have to be a skilled rafter to enjoy it. Even for inexperienced first-timers, it's a thrill you can embrace, and one I promise you'll never forget. And besides shooting down through the thundering rapids, you'll also travel through some of the most awe-inspiring tropical scenery that you can possibly imagine. When people ask me for adventure recommendations to enjoy in Costa Rica, the Rio Pacuare whitewater experience is always my #1 choice.

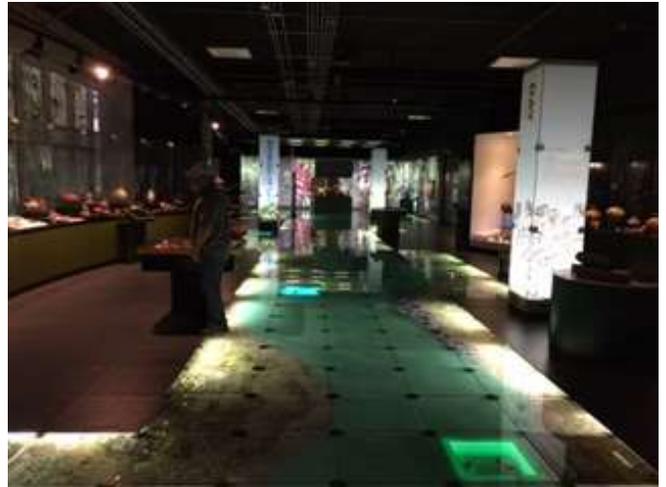
2) **The Beaches:** Costa Rica is blessed to have beaches on both the Pacific and the Caribbean coasts. Starting out from the capital city of San José, you can get to the Pacific in about 2 hours, and to the Caribbean in about 4 1/2 hours. Once you hit the coast of your choice, you can enjoy an almost endless selection of national parks and tourist destinations where you can partake in a

wide variety of activities, including fishing, surfing, snorkeling, SCUBA diving, and of course, just good old 'beach bumming' around. If surf, sand, and sun are things that you enjoy, then Costa Rica will definitely have something for you.



3) **Volcanoes:** Costa Rica is not a very large country. In fact, the state of Texas is 13.5 times larger in landmass than the whole country of Costa Rica (just to give you a little perspective). But for such a relatively small country, Costa Rica has approximately 200 volcanic formations, and 5 of those volcanoes are

classified as active. So if visiting a monumental volcano is on your list of things to do, then you've chosen the right place. Two of the most popular volcano destinations are Poas and Arenal. There are some great tours to the Poas Volcano that include extra little benefits such as butterfly farms, waterfalls, and coffee plantations, so you can enjoy a full day of adventurous sightseeing that takes in much more than just the volcano. If you travel up to the Arenal Volcano area, you'll find that it is also the home to some of the most amazing geothermal springs that you'll find anywhere in the world. My personal favorite is the Baldi Hot Springs resort, where there are lots of pools filled with water heated by the volcano, waterslides, swim-up bars, and even a wonderful buffet supper that is laid out on an expansive deck where you can enjoy your meal in the imposing shadow of the Arenal Volcano.



4) **Isla Tortuga:** If you'd like to take a trip out to the islands for a day, then I highly recommend heading out to Isla Tortuga. From the dock at the Pacific Coast city of Puntarenas, just a couple of hours out of San José, you can catch a ride on a catamaran that will spirit you away on a several hour ride out to the island. Once there, you can enjoy snorkeling, jet skis, banana boat rides, kayaking, beach volleyball, and a wide host of other sun-and-fun activities, as well as a delicious buffet luncheon spread out under the palm trees. Traveling out to Isla Tortuga for a day will give you the opportunity to enjoy all the wonder and excitement of a true beach adventure.

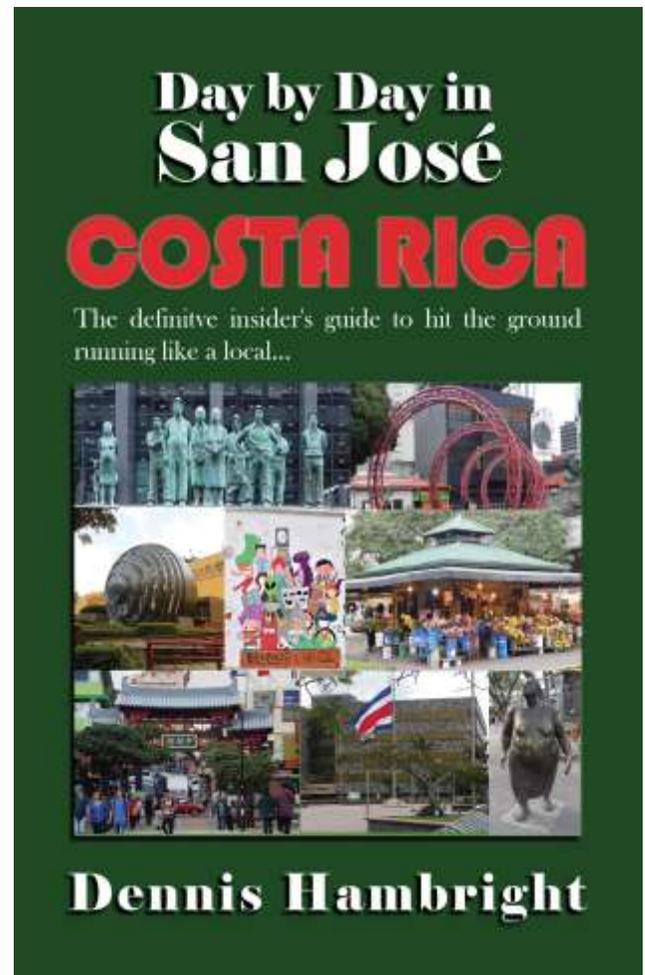
5) **Zip-Lining & Canopy Tours:** As I've mentioned before, Costa Rica is covered with lush jungles and rain forests, and one of the best ways to turn all that amazing scenery and eco-wonder into a personal adventure is by zip-lining through the treetops, or taking a more leisurely ride through the canopy in a steel cage. Either way, you'll experience the wonder of the emerald jungles in a very up-close and personal way.

Here's a little *Insider's Tip* that you might really surprise you. Besides all the well known adventures that can be had in Costa Rica, the capital city of San José is also a marvelous travel destination that's just full of history, music, culture, and an almost endless variety of great things to explore. In fact, San José is such an engaging and interesting city, when it really came into its own back in the late 1800s, the European community dubbed it the *Jewel in the Jungle*. Even more amazing, every one of the adventures I've outlined in my Top Five list above can be enjoyed as day adventures out of San

José, so not only can you enjoy the wide selection of heart-thumping, life-changing travel adventures in Costa Rica, you can take many of them as one-day-adventures right out of San José, and still have time to enjoy the city itself. So besides the sun-and-fun of the beach, or exploring the emerald jungles, or gazing into a volcanic crater, or any of the other amazing adventures Costa Rica has to offer, I hope you'll also take the time to see just what its wonderful capital city has to offer. For a real insider's guide to the city, you can check out my #1 Best Selling guide, *Day by Day in San José, Costa Rica*.

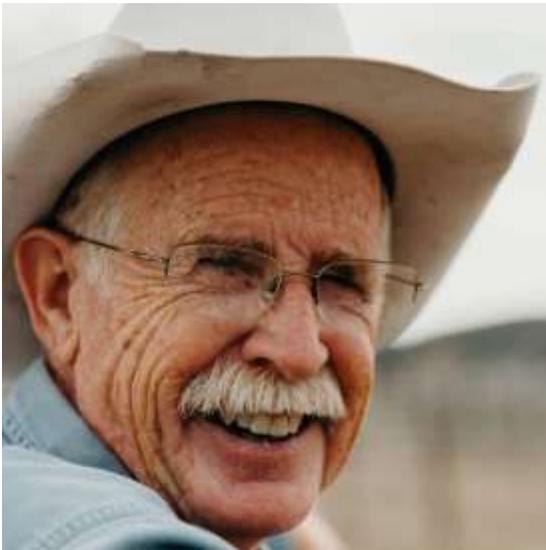
Dennis Hambright has written the definitive insider's guide to hit the ground running like a local in San José, Costa Rica. With his Amazon #1 Best Selling, ['Day by Day in San José'](#), Hambright proves that

he isn't just another wannabe who declared himself a local expert. He lives there, works there, speaks the language, and understands the culture and the people. He digs into all the nooks and crannies when it comes to getting around town like a local, and on how to get the best bang for your buck. Hambright peels back the puffy veneer that most travel writers hide behind and exposes the city like none other, covering everything from where to eat, play, workout, shop, and even where to wash your undies. Whether you're there for a day, a week, a month, or fall in love with the place and decide to stay, this is definitely the guide you don't want to be without.



THE MOVIE MAN!

WITH MARK BAUGHER



After our big success with the premiere of C-Bar, we were riding high. There was money in the bank, and we knew it was just a matter of time before a network would call us. We decided to set up some shows in other Arizona theaters. The next up was Williams, Arizona. Williams gets a million visitors every year on their way to the Grand Canyon. We used the only place available, the Sultana. It is steeped in old Arizona history. Built in 1912. Charlie Chaplin played on that stage. We rented a screen and projector. Worked the town with posters and hawking on the street.

In the end we had fifty people show up. Only two tourists. That was a big surprise. The redeeming part was their response after the show. They loved the movie. I sold books and posters, and we lost four hundred dollars. Ouch.

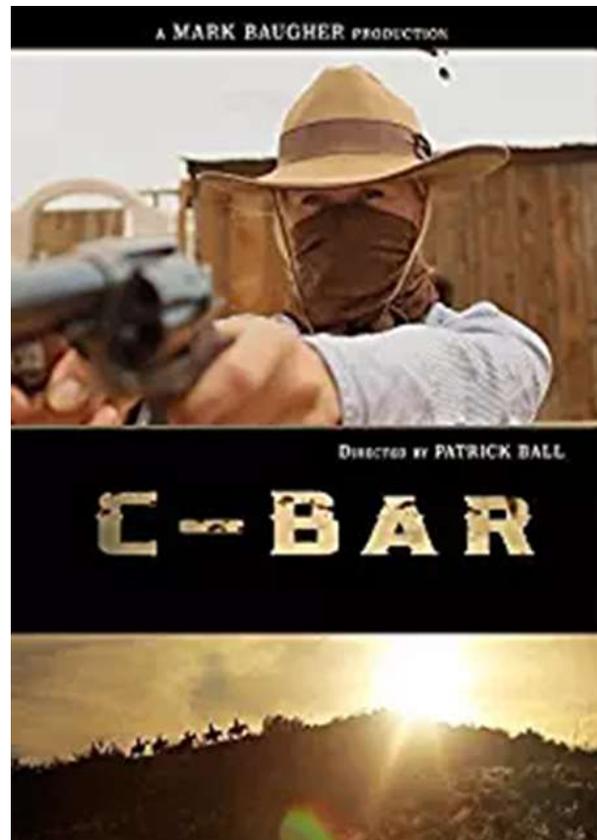
We knew then that people liked our movie. The trick was to get a crowd to come see it. To make money requires a lot of butts sitting in the audience. I got a call from a man in Tombstone. He is a big fan. Wanted to have a show for his town. Of course we said yes and away we went. This time we had eight locals show up. Lost our butts again. However, the eight people there loved the movie. It was getting painful to lose the money, but good to have the people there respond like they did. From there it was back to Prescott and a full house. This is a tricky business and I was learning all about it the hard way.

Through this process we had been winning awards at film festivals. That was nice, but it cost money to enter a film festival. There seemed to be no payoff with that approach either. I sent DVDs to movie distributors. From those that responded, they told me no because we had no big name actors. I was about to give up when a last ditch effort occurred to us. Amazon Prime. If we could get it there, we might get some exposure. It took six months to make that happen. We were exhausted with promoting by that time. Making the movie is a joy, marketing is a nightmare. The first month it was up on Amazon, it was

watched a few hundred times. We were on top of the world. At least we were getting some exposure. The second month we had C-Bar watched several thousand times. The third month C-Bar was watched 21,000 times. What comes next? We have no idea. Here is what I can tell you I have learned.

For success in any business endeavor, you need a platform to tell the world you are there. They know how to do it and have a way to show what you have created. I learned that the old ways of doing a movie have changed, as well as the way to bring it to the market place. Where are we going now, I don't have the faintest idea. What's funny is that having never made a profit, we are still planning our next project. This is proving to be a labor of love. My next big goal is making another movie and breaking even. If I can do that, I am the happiest man in the world.

Just click on the book cover to see the movie!





MY THOUGHTS ON THE OLD WEST CHRISTMAS

by Fred Staff

Yes, Christmas existed in the Old West. We must remember that most of these newcomers to the land were first generation persons, who were raised in a more stable pace and had been exposed to the tradition all of their lives. Most had come west for a new start. Times were not easy. If you were in the plains states, you faced not only lack of funds, but fierce winds and snows.

I had an old gentleman tell me of it being so cold that water froze solid in the

bucket in the house. I would think it would be very difficult to have any kind of cheer in those conditions. It wasn't an easy time. However, most of these people were of the Christian faith and had a strong belief in the symbolism of the birth of Christ.

I visited with a descendant of a family that lived in West Kansas, and they said the family traveled twenty miles in a wagon to church on Christmas. If you know the windswept plains of west Kansas, you have some idea how dedicated they were.

In most homes, decorations were done. Maybe something that the family had carried with them from the east, but more likely, evergreen strung around the house. Pine cones and holly were used where they could be found. There is no doubt that nuts and berries were used. Remember that these were cherished items. The addition of colorful ribbons, which were later used in the females' hair, was another way that color and cheerfulness was added. Of course, they had fireplaces in most homes, which I am sure was the center of attention, mostly because of necessity, but I am sure every effort was made to make it look as close to the homes they had left in the east.

Gifts were given. They usually consisted of homemade corn silk dolls or carved

toys for the children, hand-knitted scarves, gloves or hats for all the members of the family. Women often did more baking at this time, and cookies and wild game were a common bill of fare. If the year had gone well, the children got candy and maybe even a shiny penny.

We also must remember that there were thousands of soldiers stationed in the west. They usually had no family to share with, and I am told that they held church services and sang songs at Christmas. I have written about the 10th Cavalry and one of the things that Fredric Remington loved about them was their singing and great fellowship, so it only stands that where they were, song was prevalent.

This was a time to count their blessings, and I am sure that many families could do that with one hand. Life was hard, and Christmas was a time to break from the everyday drama. Death and injury was a common thing in the old west. I think of the thousands of women and children who died in childbirth. I wonder how many homes had to deal with that at this time of the year.

Another thing that comes to mind is that many Indian tribes had converted to Christianity. I am sure that any celebrations were sprinkled with dances

and festivities that were entwined with customs from their past.

I should end this with: Be it so humble there is no place like home and the sharing of good wishes and great hope for the coming year.

DON'T FORGET!

Fred Staff will be making a special appearance on the Christmas Eve episode of the Book Lovers radio show on Blog Talk Radio. Catch Fred Staff on December 24th 2017 at 3.30pm EST. Listeners can tune in here:

www.ForBookLoversOnly.com



GARY VASEY'S WORLD OF THE SUPERNATURAL

Reality and Imagination

My childhood was a strange one to say the least. One of my first memories is of a little blue man who emerged out of a mirror in my bedroom, shot me with a toy gun, and then jumped out of the window into the backyard below. You might perhaps think that I imagined it, except for the fact that my parents actually heard the gunshot! It didn't get better.

In many ways, it got worse; but before I continue with my story, let me digress just a little.

*Row, row, row your boat,
Gently down the stream.
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily,*

Life is but a dream.

I recall singing that song when I was a small child and wondering what did it mean?

Life is just a dream?

Where did this rhyme come from, and who wrote it? A bit of research suggests that the earliest printing of it was back in 1852, but who actually wrote it and why now seems lost in the mists of time. If anyone knows, please do let me know...

I thought life was a dream, too, when I was a child; or rather, I thought it a virtual reality game that I controlled, and I was sat in a box-like room connected to a machine that gave me vision and senses. So, to be honest, I didn't puzzle too much over the idea that life might be a dream. I rather accepted that it almost certainly was.

I have lost so much as I have grown, and yet I have also gained so much. My imagination as a child was beyond equal. I could create other worlds right there in my head, and my dreams and my waking life seemed interconnected and one. I could actually fly back then. Magic—physical magic—was real, and so were elves and little people.

There was the girl I loved so much, who I dreamed about over and over again, trapped on an island of towering cliffs and looked after by her wicked witch of an aunt. One dream ran into the next, even weeks apart,

until I finally rescued my love, and the wicked witch met her destiny.

We may have an unlimited imagination as children, but we have no experience of real life. Unfortunately, as we grow older and supposedly wiser, we lose much of that ability unless we work on it. It's as if we build ourselves a prison.

It begins with our parents who, knowing no better, burden us with a lot of their beliefs, fears and worries. Next, it's other kids (peer pressure) and our teachers (culture, way of seeing things, etc.). We lose our ability to just imagine, and it is replaced instead with the straight jacket that is normality and acceptance. We no longer 'row the boat, gently down the stream,' but rather fight the currents going in God knows which direction and to what end? Oblivion?

Life loses its innocence, its gaiety, its merriness. It's no longer a dream but a nightmare.

That is until you re-remember how to imagine. Re-learn how to center yourself, imagine and dream again. The combination of childish imagination skills and the adults' experiences of life to at first remember to row, gently DOWN the stream (with the current), go with the flow, merrily understanding that it is YOUR dream, and you can create your own reality.

So, as you read my short stories about some of the strange, paranormal and downright

creepy things that happened in my haunted life, ask yourself this question: Was this real, my imagination or maybe a bit of both?

My dreams took place over an extended period of time, and if you analyze them they have elements of all fairy tales, don't they? The wicked witch, the sad and mistreated niece or stepdaughter, and the prince who frees the girl and, in the end, marries her. The prince is the part of me that faces and confronts something within me—the evil, old witch—and defeats it in order to reconcile other aspects of myself.

When I look back now at my childhood, I wonder at how magical it really was. I wonder at the abilities I seem to have lost or misplaced as I have grown older and become a part of another world. Imagination is a precious commodity, and the art of dreaming is a wonderful and magical tool to heal oneself. I am convinced at times that I really lost something growing up, something truly magical. Some gift I was born with. Perhaps we all have.

You see, the problem is that "The moment you doubt whether you can fly, you cease forever to be able to do it."

JM Barrie's Peter Pan has some interesting quotes throughout in my opinion that now resonate both with me and the World that I live in. Just consider the following, and perhaps you will agree.

“Never say goodbye because goodbye means going away and going away means forgetting.”

“You know that place between sleeping and awake, that place where you can still remember dreaming? That’s where I’ll always think of you.”

“All the world is made of faith, and trust, and pixie dust.”

The thing I miss about being a child is my Peter Pan.

Every one of us has a Peter Pan within us, and we lose him growing up. Some of us never realize it nor care, but others, like me, keep looking and searching for Neverland, knowing that not only does it exist, but I once went there all of the time.

I am reading an interesting book at the moment about the nature of reality. It has an interesting way of working its theme as it has you conducting experiments that will perhaps give you a different perspective on what is normal. This last two days, I have been doing one of the experiments where you simply look everywhere and expect to see something. In my instance, I decided that I would see a pink car. Don’t ask me why. It just seemed like something fairly rare...

I actually finished reading the instructions on my Kindle, riding a bus to pick up my car from service. I decided on the pink car and looked up. As my eyes refocused on the view

through the back window of the bus, I noticed another bus. It was white, but... it had huge pink stripes on it. I thought to myself, “Okay, that’s not a car, nor is it totally pink, but that is pretty weird!”

I got off the bus and had to walk back about a half-kilometer, and I was looking at all the cars—parked, in motion, all of them. I realized that some reds had now begun to look pinkish to me, and then I saw it! Yes, a dark pink car went sailing past. In twenty-four hours, I saw two dark pink cars like that and one clearly ‘pretty little girl’ pink. Not only that, I began to notice pink everywhere. As I looked across a scene, pink items would jump up out of all the reality ‘noise’ in front of me. I saw pink writing, pink on billboards, pink houses, pink clothing, pink hair, pink ribbons... lots and lots of pink.

Now, let me tell you something. I have never, ever seen a pink car in Brno before. Never.

For the experiment, during the second twenty-four hours, you had to change it to something else... something living, perhaps... yes, an elephant. That’s what I decided. I want to see an elephant. That was last night as I sat in front of the TV, and almost immediately as I looked up, yes, there was an elephant in a commercial as if right on cue. Later, watching a YouTube reel of funny cat videos (yep—you caught me doing that!), one had two baby elephants in it, too. Obviously, I didn’t see a lot of elephants, but

I did see some. Normally, I would not have done so. I mean, who sees elephants?

So, what does this prove?

Well, I think it proves that reality really is weird.

It doesn't matter at this stage if by focusing on pink cars or elephants, I brought them into my reality or that by focusing and actively looking for something, I saw it. Both are stark results when it comes to reality. In the first, I really do create my reality by manifesting what I concentrate on; and in the latter, I manifest something that was already there but previously unnoticed by my consciousness. In the latter case, we receive so much data at any point in time, we must filter almost all of it out so that we only see what we are focused on seeing. If by focusing on something else, we now see this in the noise, then this proves something powerful, too. I mean, what ELSE are we NOT seeing because we DON'T know how to look for it? I would say that in the above paragraph, if we create our own reality that is magic; but

if by shifting our focus and noticing something that was always there but remained unseen, then that is magic, too.

So, the question is this: Did any of these strange paranormal events actually happen and did they happen because I was looking for them? Did I make them happen? Or was it all just a dream...?

Happy Holidays!

Remember this holiday to re-find your inner child and that imagination – believe in Santa again....

(This article is in part, taken from the book – My Haunted Life by G. Michael Vasey)

Don't forget to check out all the great paranormal stories on my website. Click here for more [free](#) terrors!

A QUICK NOTE FROM W.M MONTAGUE

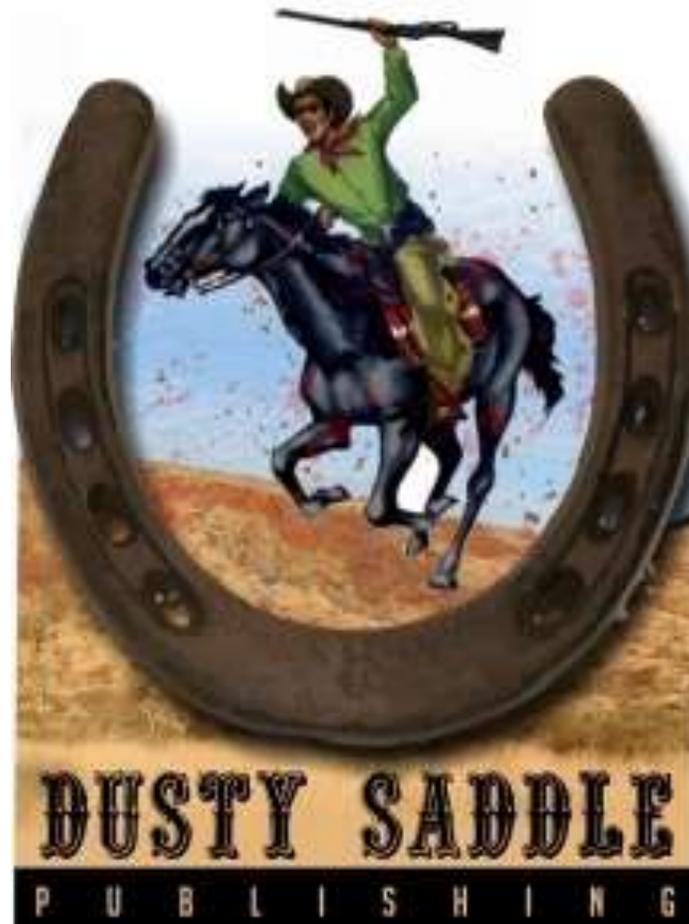


I appreciate the good folks at Westerner magazine allowing me a little space to thank all of you for the kind words you've shared with me about my monthly article, "Reality Reading with W.M. Montague." I truly appreciate it. However, misfortune has befallen me, and I've had technical problems on this end. I will

not be able to share my column with you this month. Be sure to get next month's issue of "THE WESTERNER MAGAZINE" and catch the next episode of the series about the man they call Wyatt Earp and how he would become a legend of the American West.

Now, all that said, I have been hearing some feedback about one of my articles that concerns me. I made a mistake in one of my previous columns. I said that Billy Claiborne was known as "Billy the Kid." Although this was true, he was only known locally by that name and was not the more famous William Henry McCarty Jr., a.k.a. William S. "Billy the Kid" Bonney.

I want to apologize for this error and hope you'll forgive me. Thank you for reading this note and have a great Christmas season.



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