



# VALLEY BYLINERS NEWSLETTER

December 2011



**Dec. 10: Christmas Party**  
1:30 - 3:30 p.m., Ronald McDonald House,  
1720 Treasure Hills Blvd., Harlingen.

Since no one volunteered to host the party, we contacted the Ronald McDonald House Charities (RMHC). Ms. Morales graciously offered Byliners the use of a cheerful lounge free of charge (capacity 26). We will take a tour of the facility and learn how the RMHC helps families cope with a child's prolonged hospitalization. In the Christmas spirit, the Club will make a donation to RMHC that day and individuals may do the same.

**What to Bring:** your own drink in a container convenient for drinking and a dish to share with the group: either cookies, candies, or a plate of crackers and cheese.

**Register for the Writers Workshop before the end of the December and save \$5.00. The cost will be \$35 until Jan. 1st. And \$40 after Jan. 1st**



The winner of last month's Writers Challenge was **Edna Ratliff's** entry "A Sorceress, Turtle, Dwarf"

The other entries were:

- "Late Riser" by **Frank Cortazo**
- "M.I.A." by **Rudy Garcia**
- "Vampires Suck" by **Hugh Barlow**
- "The Crimson Visitor" by **Jack King**
- "Open Season" by **Janice Workman**
- "Perfume and Socks" by **Marianna Nelson**
- "Handyman" by **Pete Gray**
- "Journey of an Empty Soul" by **Travis Whitehead**

### Next Month's Writers Challenge

*For Valley Byliners Members*

Send your short story, poem, reminiscence, essay etc., of not more than 4000 words by no later than December 8 to:

**donclifford@sbcglobal.net.**

- Don will re-send your entry, sans the author's name, to the membership.
- Each member can cast his or her vote by sending an e-mail to Don or by voting in person at the Valley Byliners meeting.
- The winning author will receive \$10.00.
- Many of the stories submitted for the challenge will be included in our next book.

### The Bragging Corner



*Been published? Been Given an Honorary Doctorate? Person of the year award? Whatever, here is the place to let us know about it.*

Nelly Venselaar's latest book *Succeed with Flying Colors* is for sale at Books and Things in Harlingen and Paragraphs on South Padre Island.



At last month's meeting, Pat Hartman informed and entertained us with her program "The Literary Properties of Music." A very talented and interesting lady.

**The December Writers Challenge will be the last Challenge under Don Clifford's supervision.**

**Thanks, Don. You did a great job!**

We need someone new to take over.

The monitor of the Writers Challenge gets to read all the stories before the rest of us, e-mails the stories (without identifying the authors) to the rest of the membership, and then keeps track of the voting. *The monitor may still enter a story if he chooses.*

If you are interested in this fun job, contact Don at **donclifford@sbcglobal.net** or Sue Groves at **Sulizan7@yahoo.com**



# PUBLISH THAT BOOK!

## Valley Byliners Writers Workshop

Harlingen Public Library

Saturday, Feb. 11, 2012

9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

# AND YOUR ARTICLE TOO



Learn about:

Mainstream publishing

On-demand publishing

Physical self-publishing

E-books

Featuring:

**Laurel Bill,**  
award winning  
journalist  
and author

**Early Registration: \$35**  
Mail checks payable to  
Valley Byliners,  
c/o Jose Alvarez  
130 Pizarro Ave.  
Rancho Viejo, TX 78575

After Jan. 1: \$40 by mail or  
pay at workshop, 8:30 a.m.

**How to:**

Choose your topic  
Identify your audience  
Research the Market  
Make your prose sparkle  
Find a great copy editor

**Tips for:**

Marketing plans  
Book signings  
Media networking  
Press packages  
Reviews  
And lots more!

The Valley Byliners Writers Workshop presenter will be **Laurel Bill**

## Who is Laurel Bill?

Third-generation Alaskan **Laurel Downing Bill** is author of the recently released Alaska history series, titled "Aunt Phil's Trunk." Volumes 1 through 4, which include about 350 historical photographs per book, feature lively stories about Alaska's colorful past.

The series developed after Laurel inherited newspaper clips, research and rare Alaska history books from her Alaska historian aunt, Phyllis Downing Carlson, who died in 1993. It started as a weekly newspaper column in The Anchorage Chronicle in July 2002. The column soon became one of the most popular features in the newspaper chain.

She began developing the series in 2005 and published Volume 1, which covers the Great Land from early Native history up to the Klondike Gold Rush of 1898, in 2006. The next three volumes appeared on the market during 2007, 2008 and 2009.

With press reviews touting her work as "the most well-researched, well-written and fun-to-read Alaska history available," the books now sell all across Alaska from stores like Barnes & Nobles and Wal-mart to small independent bookstores and gift shops.

Born in Fairbanks in 1951, Laurel moved to Juneau in 1959 after her father, Richard Downing, became the state's first commissioner of public works.

Eight years later, she began traveling when her father took a job with a company building roads and bridges around the world. She spent time in Cameroon and Liberia, in West Africa, Tanzania in East Africa, and Indonesia, Hong Kong and Singapore.

She graduated from an American high school in Mallorca, Spain, in 1969, and then attended one year of college in Leysin, Switzerland.

Laurel returned to Alaska in 1970, where she eventually met her husband, Don Bill, in Fairbanks. In 1974, the couple moved to King Salmon – a small village about 360 air miles southwest of Anchorage. There they raised their two children, Kim and Ryan, in the remote community while Don worked as area biologist for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game Commercial Fisheries Division and Laurel worked her way up to assistant general manager for the Bristol Bay Telephone Cooperative Inc.



After 24 years, they retired into Anchorage. That's when Laurel got a chance to go through her late historian aunt's papers. When she saw the quality of her aunt's work, she knew she needed to make it public. And she knew she needed tools to do the job right. So she enrolled at the University of Alaska to learn about writing. Laurel graduated with a degree in journalism and a minor in history in 2003.

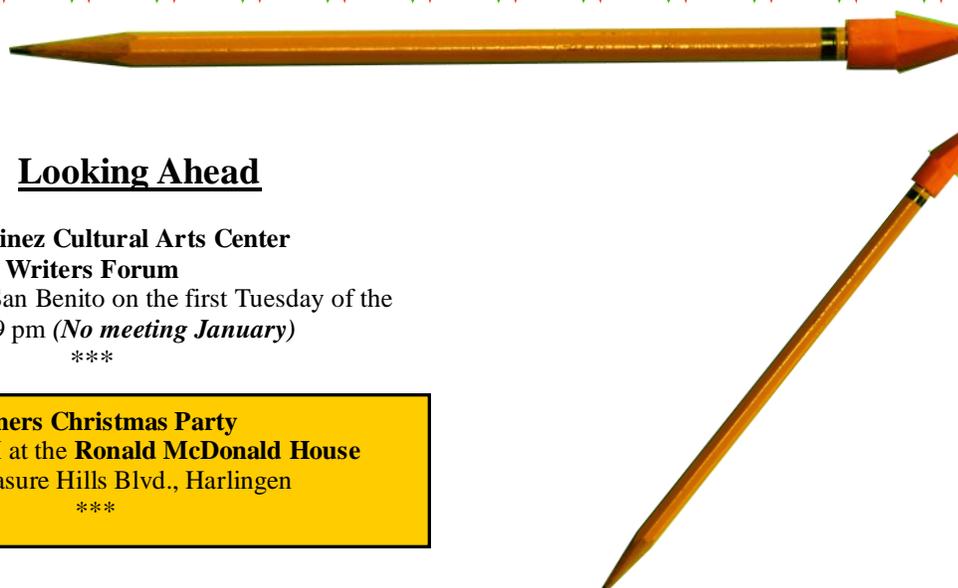
During her junior year in college, she took an internship as a copy editor with Alaska Newspapers Inc., which published seven rural weekly newspapers. In July 2002, when the company started a new weekly paper called The Anchorage Chronicle, she became one of its main reporters – and birthed the column, "Aunt Phil's Trunk."

Other award-winning articles she authored include "Life or Meth," a Chronicle story that highlighted methamphetamine cooks, users and undercover cops in Anchorage. It earned sixth place in the nation in a William Randolph Hearst Foundation competition in 2004. "Condo Catastrophes," a four-week series appearing in the Chronicle the same year, covered the shady side of the building industry in Anchorage. It won first place from the Alaska Press Club in 2005.

"Blue Parka Bandit," printed in the Fairbanks Daily News Miner in 2005, told about a gold-rush era highwayman in Alaska's Interior and earned her second-place honors from the Alaska Press Club in 2006. That story appears in Volume 1 of her series.

Laurel is currently writing Volume 5, the last book in her "Aunt Phil's Trunk" series, while she and her husband spend the summers in Alaska and the winters enjoying the sunshine of deep South Texas.

Her presentation will focus, among other things, on mainstream publishing, self-publishing, e-books, how to choose one's topic and identifying the book's audience, and on how to make the prose sparkle. She will also offer tips on marketing plans, book signings, press packages, book reviews, and much more.



### Looking Ahead

**Dec.6 ~Narciso Martinez Cultural Arts Center  
Writers Forum**  
225 E Stenger St., San Benito on the first Tuesday of the month, 7-9 pm (*No meeting January*)  
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**Dec. 10- Valley Byliners Christmas Party**  
1:30 to 3:30 PM at the **Ronald McDonald House**  
1720 Treasure Hills Blvd., Harlingen  
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**Dec.11-Poetry Readings** at the Harlingen Public Library  
In the Auditorium on the second Monday of every month.  
Readings may also include stories, not just poetry.  
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**Jan 14-Valley Byliners** 1:30 Harlingen Public Library  
Speaker Pat Avery "Keeping the Stories Alive"  
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**At Paragraphs On South Padre Island:**

- **Saturdays** 1-3 pm— Literary Mercado
- **Nov. 28-** 7 pm — Writers Round Table with special guest, **Jan Seale**, 2012 Texas Poet Laureate
- **Dec. 12 -** 7 pm — Play Readers
- **Dec. 26-** 7 pm — Writers Round Table

(call 956-433-5057 to confirm the event before going)  
[Paragraphs Calendar](#)  
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**Feb 11-Valley Byliners Workshop**  
**Get that Book Published!**

For a list of more events that Valley writers might be interested in, check out **Edgar Clinton's** website, [Writers of the Rio Grande](#).

**OH! Did I mention that you can get a discount on the Writers Workshop if you register before Jan 1st ?**  
Early registration for the workshop is \$35 if paying by January 1, 2012. Checks can be mailed payable to Valley Byliners c/o Jose Alvarez 130 Pizarro Ave. Rancho Viejo TX 78515. After January 1, the cost will be \$40 payable by mail or at the workshop itself at 8:30 AM .



**And our annual dues for the coming year are Due in December. Dues for the 2012 year are \$20. Send your dues to Jose at the address above.**