VALLEY BYLINERS

A writer's group in the Rio Grande Valley.

Valley Byliners "Bullet" Newsletter April 2015

Please forward this newsletter to a friend.

Speaker Dr. Noreen Graf— Flash and Nano Fiction

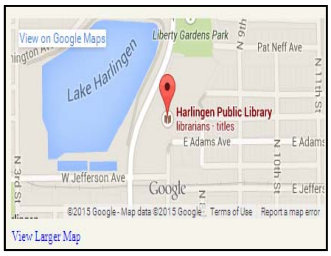
The Valley Byliners, a writers group open to anyone interested in writing and publishing, will meet on Saturday, April 11, 2015, at 1:30 p.m. in the Harlingen Public Library located at 410 '76 Drive.

Our speaker will be **Dr. Noreen Graf**, UTRGV professor of rehabilitation. Her program is on Flash and Nano Fiction.

Dr. Graf has published over fifty academic publications in the areas of trauma, rehabilitation and recovery. She has presented her research both locally and nationally and received awards for her work.

Dr. Graf has written numerous flash fiction and short stories, and has completed her second novel. For more information call 956-630-5166 or visit http://rgvbyliners.org.

The Valley Byliners, a writers group open to anyone interested in writing and publishing, will meet on Saturday, March 14, 2015, at 1:30 p.m. in the Harlingen Public Library located at 410 '76 Drive.



Improve Your Writing

We are a writer's group located in Harlingen, Texas.

Our mission is to encourage and support the Rio Grande Valley writing community through workshops, lectures, writing competitions and other programs.

We meet on the second Saturday of each month 1:30 p.m. in the Harlingen Public Library.

Visitors are always welcome.

The Children's Contest

The children's contest is in April . It is the next writers contest for 1500 words.

Next year 2016, unless things change, February will still be Children's story, up to 1500 words, and April will be anything you would like to enter up to 1500 words.

Byliners Writing Contest

We have 2 awesome stories to choose from: The Man in Black and The Virginian Meets Buggs Bunny.
You can vote at the meeting on the 14th, or send me your vote by the 13th 7 PM.
Hope to see you at the meeting, thanks Edna

Valley Byliners Monthly Writing Challenges

April .....limit 1500 words any type of written work

May.....60 lines Poetry

June.....limit 4000 words any type of writing

"Critique invited"

THE MAN IN BLACK

The man in black strode alone through the common area, oblivious to the startled gazes of the tourists and their guides, of the archeologists, even the sharp stare of the lady from Texas whose rapid scrutiny had already taken stock of all of Palenque and now followed the man in black's movements with intense interest.

Tall, thin, unnaturally erect, his hard eyes fixated on nothing of this world, he climbed the slope of the pyramid without pause, stood silently at the top as though immersed in a sacred observance, then turned, rapidly descended the steep steps and left. He spoke to no one, met no one's eye.

He never came back.

On the way to the ruins he had commanded his hired driver to stop at a certain unremarkable spot by the side of the road—a spot known only to him. Exiting the vehicle, he had glided into the jungle. The driver had nervously struggled to keep pace, stumbling over the hidden stones while glancing at the sky as distant thunder rumbled.

Abruptly, the man in black had stopped and knelt at one of the many unmarked stones. Grasping the ancient stone with both hands, he had slowly raised it. Underneath, in a sculpted cavity, rested a human skull and a cache of bones, an entire skeleton it seemed, picked clean by time.

"Para siempre." He had said in a faint whisper, barely audible. *"Se queda para siempre."*

He had lifted the skull, set it aside with a gentle caress, searched among the bones and palmed a small object with his left hand. The driver couldn't see from where he stood, couldn't see his hands. Didn't want to see.

The man in black had carefully replaced the skull—again with a gentle caress—and the stone exactly as they had been, guarding the bones, then had left without a word, trailing his driver behind him.

Trembling, the driver started the car and continued in the direction of the ruins.

After the unsettling visit to the pyramid the man dressed all in black returned to his hired car. The driver reluctantly got in and nosed his vehicle onto the road leading back to the little town. Nervously, he increased his speed, hoping to finish this assignment, to take his leave of this uncomfortable passenger as soon as possible.

Again, the man in black commanded the driver to stop at the exact spot as before. Again he glided into the forest, the driver grudgingly following behind.

Again he grasped the flat stone with both hands. From his new angle the driver could see the left hand clearly and took a step back, repelled at the sight. The hand was painfully misshapen, scarred and twisted into a claw much like that of a grasping raven, a cawing black crow, the black nails long and sharp and ugly.

Again, the man in black raised the stone and lifted the skull with a gentle caress. This time he returned the small object to its nest among the bones. This time the driver could see the object and recognized it as a ring, a thin golden band.

As they emerged from the forest, the helpful lady from Texas was there, helpful and curious, standing beside her car, staring. *"¿Un problema con el carro?"* she asked in lightly accented Spanish.

The driver had had enough. He pushed out of the foliage and bolted, staggering, to his vehicle. He jerked open the car door and spilled clumsily into the driver's seat. The motor roared to life and he sped away with a screech of rubber and a shower of gravel.

The man in black smiled. A rictus smile, a grimace showing very white, very sharp teeth. A grimace intended to be friendly, charming. *"¿Un aventón, señora?"* he whispered. *"¿Al pueblo, señora?"*

The lady from Texas hesitated. She wanted to say no. No! But her vocal cords were frozen. She tried again, failed, then nodded 'yes' and got back into her car. The man in black passed behind the vehicle and slid into the passenger seat, his body erect, as still as death. His face turned suddenly toward her in a snapping lizard-like movement. His eyes were black as night but floating with shivery silver specks. The rictus smile again. The harsh whisper again. *"Gracias, señora. Muy amable."*

The lady from Texas turned the key, grasped the wheel and, trembling, pressed the accelerator. Jerkily the car started down the road. Faster and faster she pushed it. It will be all right, she told herself. It's not far. I need gas, I'm almost out. I'll stop at the Pemex station in town. Yes, the Pemex station with the sweet little round man who always teases me about my Texas plates. Alberto—no, Adalberto. *'La Tejana'*, he calls me.

A few kilometers passed, not many but the little town was that much closer. The man in black sat stiffly, impassively, staring straight ahead, the rictus smile still in place as though he had forgotten it was there. A few more kilometers.

Suddenly he raised his hand. The left hand. The claw. A long finger pointed crookedly, pointed to an approaching turn off. *"Allí,"* he rasped. *"Aquél camino."*

She didn't want to, but she was unable to choose. Slowing, she turned to the right onto the smaller road. I know this road, she thought. Last year, or was it the year before, in an exploratory mood, she had followed it for a couple of kilometers. It had started out fine, where they were now, but soon deteriorated. She had turned around while she still could and sped back to the main road.

If anything, it was now in even worse condition and frayed further as she drove. After three or four kilometers she had to slow to a crawl, afraid the potholes would shake the car apart. As they crawled unevenly along in low gear the road became even more ruined, the holes deeper, the surrounding foliage pressing ever closer, scraping on the sides of the car with an eerie scratching sound.

The thick trees were blocking the light with their overhead leaves and branches and the light itself was dimming. She glanced at the dashboard clock. It will be dark soon, she thought, with mounting unease. She glanced over at the man in black. His face again snapped toward her, the lizard eyes and rictus smile barely visible in the gloom. She jerked the wheel in fright, almost sending the car into the underbrush.

"Un poco más adelante, señora," he whispered.

She had begun casting nervous glances at the gas gauge. It had been low to start with and now showed almost on empty. Will I have enough to get back? To get to the happy little round man at the Pemex? Adalberto. Where could I possibly turn around on this narrow track?

Another kilometer slowly passed, then two. It was totally dark now, except for the long headlights tunneling through the encroaching foliage. A pair of glowing eyes showed from the forest, then another. A movement flashed across the road just in front of the car. An animal? Something else?

The thunder rumbled, more loudly this time. Then again. She knew it wouldn't rain; it was still too early in the season, a few more days, but the oppressive humidity thickened around her. Her hands were slick on the wheel.

She ground over the decaying road for another kilometer. Without warning the car shuddered, gasped. The motor caught again for a moment then sputtered to a stop. Out Of Gas, the gauge said.

She closed her eyes and sat still, afraid to move, afraid to think. It was deathly quiet; even the darkened jungle was hushed, as if waiting. The paralyzing panic started in her toes and slowly crept up her body until it possessed her entirely. Her body trembled, shuddered. She felt a touch. The touch of a claw on the back of her neck.

A gentle caress . . . .

I looked ahead and saw a large tent. This one held no artworks nor performers as did the others. It stood vacant and silent.

As I approached it, I noticed a large, cardboard poster attached to a small tripod. Large printed words upon it read:

COME BY AND MEET JAMES DRURY,
THE STAR OF THE TV SERIES *THE VIRGINIAN.*

Below this was a photograph of Mr. Drury himself, garbed in complete western style attire. The image brought back memories of those times when television was dominated by cowboys and gunslingers.

I looked toward the interior of the tent, hoping to see Mr. Drury. All I saw, however, was an older gentleman whose white T-shirt and faded jeans indicated he was someone else.

"Is James Drury around?" I asked him. "I had heard he would be here yesterday. I didn't know he would be here today, also."

"You just missed him," the man replied, pushing back his white, graying hair as he removed the battered, beige western hat he wore. "He finished for the day and went back to his hotel room no more than ten minutes ago."

I missed him by no more than ten minutes, I thought, *during the time I was sketching Bugs Bunny.*

"Sorry," the man said, noticing my disappointment.

"No problem," I said, heading toward the parking lot nearby.

Since that day, I have wondered what would have transpired Had I met Mr. Drury. Would I have asked about what it was like to have been a part of that iconic western TV series? Would I have asked about Doug McClure? Would I have asked him what it was like working with Elvis Presley in the King of Rock-and Roll's first movie *Love Me Tender?* Would I have asked him about his role as a villain in the movie *Ride the High Country?* Or would I have asked him if he knew why re-runs never air of the short-lived final season of *The Virginian* retitled *The Men From Shiloh?* Those particular episodes, rotating Mr. Drury, Doug McClure, and actors Lee Majors and Stewart Granger, were my favorites of the entire series. Listening to a different beginning credits score by my favorite movie composer Ennio Morricone from Italy, was one reason I watched them. I love listening to Italian western movie music. This particular piece, by the greatest composer in the genre, was and still is one of my particular favorites.

I wonder what Mr.Drury's reaction would have been if I had mentioned *The Men From Shiloh*. Maybe he would have said I knew my westerns well because I remembered those final episodes most everyone else all but forgot about.

I think he might have asked about my Bugs Bunny sketch and I would have told him my plans for it at the Lyford elementary school where I worked at the time. Maybe he would have commented about how important the teaching profession is.

All of this is mere speculation. No matter what scenario might have occurred, the fact is I missed meeting James Drury. I missed meeting him by no more than ten minutes while sketching the face of Bugs Bunny.

No autograph.
No conversation about his TV series.
No questions about my Bugs Bunny sketch.

Not even a quick glimpse of him.

Nothing.

James Drury meeting Bugs Bunny.
It never happened.

I can imagine how people feel when they come close to winning something, only to have it slip away.

Since that day, I have not met any other famous TV or movie actors. More opportunities presented themselves after the State Farm Arena, formerly the Dodge Arena, was built near the city of McAllen. I have never made the time to go there, other than on a classroom field trip to watch a live Walt Disney musical performance. One of these days, though, I might do it.

During recent years, I do not sketch or draw as often as I used to. I do not intend on abandoning it, though. The fact is, now, during my retirement years, I focus more upon fiction writing. At last, not dealing with the demands of the teaching profession, I am able to concentrate on what I love doing. Sometimes, If I do not have anything else to do, I draw simple, basic shapes of characters from comic books. Drawing these types of pictures is what my former students remember about me.

"We would do *anything* to get any of those pictures," commented one of them, grown up, to a coach colleague I worked with at a Raymondville elementary school during my last teaching years.

I guess my sketches influenced most of my students more than my teaching ever did. I know of at least one young man who went on to become an art graphics designer. He even gave me a picture he drew of several spaceships hovering over an area. It inspired *me* to write a science-fiction story about those spaceships.

And the Bugs Bunny sketch?

I still have it. It is placed within the binder holding over five hundred others. It lies there within a plastic sheet along with the likenesses of Batman, Superman, Spider-Man, Wonder Woman, Mount Rushmore, Barnabas Collins, John Rambo, and many others.

Every time I look at the Bugs Bunny sketch, though, I remember that warm, Autumn afternoon at Fair Park.

I remember the sights of Rio Fest at its fullest, an event no longer held there. I remember when I drew it during those ten minutes when I could have been meeting James Drury.

I see the rabbit's face still leering toward the left side. It is as if he is thinks the whole situation was comical.

And, as I look toward the lower left corner, I see the date I wrote to remember when I drew it.

October 13, 1991.

The day when the Virginian *almost* met Bugs Bunny.

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