



# Valley Byliners Newsletter

Harlingen, TX

October 6, 2009



*From Jeff Harris:*

**I just received word from the IRS that Valley Byliners' application for 501(c)(3) status has been granted. Additionally, a determination was made that we qualify as a public charity.**

**My thanks to all of the members who helped to make this happen.**

*Editor's note: Our thanks to you, Jeff, for a wonderful job.*



**Back to Byliners by popular demand, Sarah Cuadra of Storybook Garden, Weslaco, has agreed to be the Byliners guest speaker for the January 9, 2010, program. Don asked if she would include the publishing industry problems she learned about, how we might work around them, and her perspectives from an Independent Book Publisher and Retailer viewpoint.**

**The Festiva Writers Issue, September 18, 2009, featured two Valley Byliner authors: Brenda Riojas and her poem What He Crosses Into, and Don Clifford with his short story The Outhouse. Julieta Corpus of the Narcisso Martinez Cultural Center Writers Forum and her poem 'Barbas de Oro.' were also featured. Festiva is a weekly entertainment magazine of the McAllen Monitor.**

**According to staff writer, Zach Quaintance, the three selections were among 40 submissions to the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual creative writing contest open to all readers of the Monitor. Included were entries from creative writing classes at UTPA and STC. Judges looked for voice, universal themes and originality.**

**“In all likelihood, we will run the contest again at this time next year,” Quaintance said.**



### **Writing Tips: Those Pesky Contractions**

**Modern writing style is informal and reflects our speaking habits. Contractions such as ‘don’t’, ‘haven’t’, ‘should’ve’, etc., appear in news stories, magazines, advertising, and in a variety of publications. At one time, no good story or article with a claim to literary style contained a contraction, unless it was in a sentence of dialogue.**

**What caused the change? Probably the advent of radio in which we heard the written word. Later, in TV journalism, an abundance of words was a costly commodity, so scriptwriters for newscasts economized with contractions as much as possible. Soon, the written word was no different from the spoken word.**

**When should we not use contractions? Generally in any form of formal writing, such as a treatise on the sex life of a two-toned amoeba, or when the author strives for emphasis. For instance, in the sentence “I don’t want you to go to the movies.” the contraction ‘don’t’ is not a forceful demand. In “I do not want you to go to the movies!” the speaker makes a demand that implies a consequence if the demand is not met. Read the two sentences out loud and note the difference.**

**As a rule of thumb, use contractions in writing that is informal, humorous and light hearted. Any attempts at literary style should avoid the use of contractions. But, like anything else, all rules are subject to change.**



**T**hanks to all the contributors, the first phase of 'The Book's' publication nears completion. The deadline/cut-off date for submissions is **October 15, 2009**. Those of you who committed to providing a short story or poem need to submit your work to [donclifford@sbcglobal.net](mailto:donclifford@sbcglobal.net). Include, also, a brief one paragraph biographical sketch. before the 15th - if you want to see it published.

'The Book' is an anthology that covers a wide range of subject matter but without a specific theme, like 'Tales Told At Midnight...' or 'Roots By The Rio'. Therefore I suggest a working title such as 'Tales Told Just For The Fun Of It...'. This will be discussed during the Oct. 17 Byliners meeting. Meanwhile, suggestions for a title are welcome. Here are a few suggestions:

**Tales Told From The Texas Border**

**Tales Told Along The Rio Grande**

**Tales Told Just For Fun Along The Rio Grande**

**Collected Tales Told For Fun \***

**Collected Tales Told Along The Rio Grande**

**\*Collected Tales Told for Fun. Hernán Moreno-Hinojosa said, "The reason I am suggesting this is because anytime you can get your book's title to start with an 'a, b or c' and it makes it to the bookstore it will have a more prominent place on the bookshelves. This because bookstores list books (especially anthologies with not one particular author) alphabetically."**

**This should be an interesting discussion!**



### **“Three-Minute Fiction” Contests on National Public Radio (NPR)**

*Submitted by Marianna Nelson*

**This summer, NPR’s Weekend Edition invited listeners to write vivid fiction that can be read in three minutes or less. Round 2 submitters were required to start their stories with this sentence, “The nurse left work at 5 o’clock.”**

**On Sept. 27, the “Three-Minute Fiction” judge, James Wood, read “Last Seen,” the entry he had chosen as winner from the approximately 4,000 Round 2 submissions. Wood is a book critic and staff writer at the New Yorker. The winning author, Kathy Formosa of Port Townsend, Washington, won a copy of Wood’s book, How Fiction Works, and was interviewed by Wood on Weekend Edition. Her story was also published on [npr.org](http://npr.org) along with stories from top contenders.**

**The Round 3 contest will have new challenges and new judges. To learn when the contest will begin, tune into Weekend Edition on KMBH, 88.9 FM, Saturdays and Sundays at 5 p.m. Or, go to [npr.org](http://npr.org) and search for three-minute fiction.**



## **Summary of Byliners program on Sept. 12**

*Marianna Nelson*

**The Byliners guest speaker, Carlos Cisneros, gave this advice to writers seeking to publish their books:**

### **Never give up.**

**Case in point, three years after Cisneros had no takers from 350 query letters pitching “The Case Runner”, Arte Publico Press at the University of Houston said they wanted to buy the manuscript. Thus began the Brownsville attorney’s second career as an author of legal thrillers. Cisneros’s second novel, The Name Partner, is due to come out next March. After that, Alejandro del Fuerte, the principal character of his first book, will be back in a sequel to The Case Runner entitled The Land Grant.**

### **What to do about the conundrum, agent vs. publisher?**

**Agents don’t want to work with unpublished authors and most publishers won’t look at work not sent by an agent. Unable to find an agent, Cisneros sent his manuscript to a niche publisher of Latino work written in English. Three years later, Arte Publico contacted him just as he was ready to quit writing. In May 2009, “The Case Runner” won the International Latino Book Award for the best new Mystery Novel in English.**

### **Contracts are tricky.**

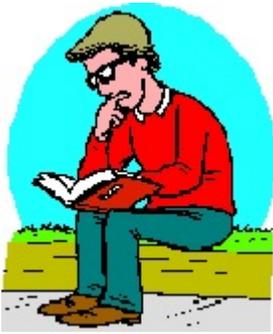
**Make sure your contract is specific for the book you are publishing. Have a property lawyer look at it.**

### **Be prepared to promote your book**

**It will take time and money. Publishers do very little promoting, even for big-name authors.**

### **An autobiographical work of the average person has little commercial value.**

**To turn your experiences into compelling fiction, first target your audience, then study the works of your favorite novelists.**



## **October is “Big Read” month in Harlingen**

*Marianna Nelson*

**Harlingen’s Big Read began on Oct. 1 with a showing of the movie, Fahrenheit 451. Copies of Ray Bradbury’s classic science fiction novel were given out and individuals signed up to memorize two sentences from Bradbury’s book and recite them sequentially at a discussion later this month.**

**This exercise parallels, in a smaller way, the efforts of characters in the book to memorize whole books before they were burned by a squad of firemen.**

### **Big Read schedule:**

**Oct. 8: discuss the book’s themes—censorship and technology—in the library courtyard at noon.**

**Oct. 14: Mona Sizer presents, “Ray Bradbury, the Storyteller” at 2 p.m. in the library.**

**Oct. 27: general discussion of Fahrenheit 451 in the library auditorium at 7 p.m.**

**Go to [www.neabigread.org](http://www.neabigread.org) for more information about the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) endeavor to “Create a Nation of Readers.”**