Why I Write

By JOHN W. EVANS

I write to keep ahead of what terrifies me and also to distinguish that terror from the present moment and the people that I love. If such a distinction measures time in my life, then, more and more, it also measures joy. I’m happy for that distinction.

I was trained as a poet. I wrote my first poems about travel and work and marriage. After college I lived abroad for two years, taught middle school in Chicago for three, and then married and earned an MFA.

I remember thinking this would always be my life: riding buses in big cities, writing drafts, hoping for inspiration. Then, it was effort that seemed important. Could I make the time to write well about the things that mattered to me? When my first wife, Katie, died, I thought of those years instead as a kind of training. I had learned how to be eloquent when a real subject came along. I was not happy to have the subject. But I was happy to know how to write.

I keep a quotation tacked over my desk:

“Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.” (Vaclav Havel)

I take that quote to mean that outcomes are unpredictable; it’s better to look for moments of understanding and communion. Once, after a reading for Young Widower, my memoir about Katie’s death and the grief and guilt that followed during the year that I lived with her family, a stranger observed that the book was entirely sexless, which from a Freudian perspective meant that my wife’s death had regressed me to a prepubescent world of grief. Sure, I said, that made sense. The interpretation had never occurred to me. I was happy to talk with her about what the book meant, because such conversations helped me to understand better my own experience.

I am writing tonight at a desk that faces a window. It is Sunday evening, late. Someone in the neighborhood is singing a ballad in a language I do not recognize. I can hear him out the window, across the neighbor’s yard. His voice is amplified. Whenever he sings the chorus of the song, other people sing, too. They know
NEW SERIES: DISCOVER THE GREAT PLAINS

Discover the Great Plains is a new series published in cooperation with the Center for Great Plains Studies to provide short, plain-English introductions to the natural wonders, diverse cultures, history, and contemporary life of the Great Plains. The first book in the series, Great Plains Indians by David J. Wishart, was released in September.

Rick Edwards, series editor and director of the Center, conceived the idea to bring the most recent Great Plains scholarship to the public. The Center works to increase understanding of and appreciation for the peoples, cultures, and natural environment of the Great Plains. This region is frequently defined by its real or presumed deficits—no mountains, no oceans, no great cities, no diversity, no iconic natural marvels, no world-class centers of culture—but Edwards believes its greatest deficit may be people’s lack of knowledge about it. As one of the world’s great grassland biomes, the Great Plains is a place of extreme importance for biodiversity, it contains sublime and almost ethereal prairie landscapes, and over time its peoples have constructed rich and varied cultures.

The series’s authors, experts in their fields, use their own personal experiences as well as their deep knowledge to create entertaining and authoritative guides to important aspects of the region. Initial books in the series will cover Great Plains Indians, geology, bison, literature, weather, and civic leadership.

The reader will find pleasure in exploring—and discovering anew—the delights, challenges, and majesty of this vast region. Discover the Great Plains books bridge the gap between the specialized, often technical writings of scientists and scholars and the interested general reader. Increasingly today, publications of experts are understandable only to a narrow circle of peers, yet their work continues to be of great import to the public. Books in this series invite non-specialist readers to enjoy their concise, authoritative, and easy-to-understand treatments.
Francis French:

It almost sounds too good to be true: an unpublished memoir written by an astronaut who piloted the very first Apollo flight, sitting in a pile of papers in his widow's closet. And yet that's exactly what I came across when I was looking through the many boxes of space memorabilia and lifetime memories at the home of Susie Eisele Black, the widow of Apollo 7 astronaut Donn Eisele.

Donn Eisele had always been an enigma to me and many others interested in NASA's Apollo space program. He passed away in the 1980s, too early for me to have the opportunity to meet him. From what I had read about him, he was considered lighthearted, easygoing, and often so innocuous that he faded into the background of some of humankind's greatest moments of exploration. I knew this could not be the full story, however, as he had also been in the center of two tumultuous and controversial events.

The first was the Apollo 7 flight, the crew of which—by some accounts—had had unprecedented disagreements with Mission Control. I had read of testy radio exchanges and vows by mission planners that none of the crew would ever fly in space again. None of them did. I had also read about how Donn Eisele had, without wishing it, become the test case for how much astronauts would be allowed to veer away from their media image as all-American space heroes who lived the ultimate in stereotypically wholesome lives. Divorce, in that climate, was unthinkable. And yet Donn chose to divorce and to try and remain an astronaut. This easygoing man chose to pit himself against the unwritten rules his bosses had made very plain to him.

Donn later remarried and retired from NASA but died suddenly of a heart attack in 1987 while on business in Tokyo. Years later I met Donn's widow, Susie Eisele Black, who granted me access to Donn's papers and notes. When I came across a stack of typewritten, translucent onionskin sheets in a closet, I found many of the answers to my questions. Written not long after he had left NASA, these words represented a man with a new mission—he wanted to tell his story and explain what had happened to him. He was unsparing in some of his criticisms of...
UNP PARTICIPATES IN KANEKO’S STORYTELLING PROGRAM

UNP was thrilled to take part in KANEKO’s storytelling program this past summer. From June through August, KANEKO held events and workshops that explored the creative process of storytelling and how design informs both the content and context in which stories are conveyed. As part of their program, KANEKO displayed UNP’s 75 iconic covers throughout the summer, and UNP’s participation culminated in a lively and well-attended event with Ted Kooser on August 25.
In Step with *Hotel Amerika*: UNP’s Newest Journal

While the connection may not have been conscious on the part of the *Hotel Amerika* editors, it was certainly appropriate that they chose a joyful photo of Omaha, Nebraska, native Fred Astaire for the cover of the first issue *Hotel Amerika* published with the University of Nebraska Press this summer.

*Hotel Amerika* is a venue for both well-known and emerging writers, presenting some of the most unique and provocative poetry, fiction, and nonfiction available. The journal has been featured in *The Pushcart Press Prize Anthology*, *Best American Essays*, and *Best American Poetry* and is regularly cited as one of the leading literary journals in the United States. Its tagline, “Many rooms, cool sheets,” sums up its eclectic, sometimes nonconventional approach.

When the partnership was formed, the journal’s editor, David Lazar, professor of nonfiction in the Department of Creative Writing at Columbia College Chicago and UNP author, said: “The common desires of both *Hotel Amerika* and the University of Nebraska Press to continue to produce a magazine that sustains the qualities that *Hotel Amerika* has represented for thirteen years made the match seem perfect.” We at UNP agree, and we’re dancing with excitement about it!
the words. It sounds like a fun party. There are clinking bottles, chattering strangers, big laughs. Why am I sitting alone, writing this essay, while others are singing and celebrating? Is loneliness my subject now, the result of having devoted so much time to writing? I’ve felt a mix of loneliness and exception anytime I’ve traveled and lived abroad. I miss that feeling. I feel it sometimes when I write something very well.

I write for very practical reasons. I want to remember and understand the past. I need to imagine it. My imagination is vivid. It trends toward the fantastical and, sometimes, the vigilant. If I die unexpectedly, I want my wife and three young boys to know that I loved them and was paying attention. My sons are six, four, and two. Between bowls of buttered noodles, baths, and bedtime stories, how could I possibly begin to explain that I might die, or why I want them to know this, much less that I was married before to a woman I loved very much, who died and whose place in my life is well-kept and inseparable from my affection for them. Would they care?

When I write I never feel like I am wasting time. It is an incredible satisfaction to feel oneself making progress toward anything in life. More than the satisfaction of a finished book or poem or essay, it is the pursuit of this provisional feeling that sustains my need to write. But such satisfaction has a dark side to it, too, an excessive attention to self and, sometimes, a scrutiny of the world around me. Neurosis, the stranger at the reading might call it, though writers long before Freud described such inward and restless turning.

Writing well touches a nerve: in me, in the people I love, in strangers who say nice things, even among Internet trolls who wish no one well. Their close attention makes me think I must be doing right, to inspire such feeling. Often I feel competitive with other writers. I want to do as well as the writers I admire. I want to do better than the ones I don’t. I know that comparisons are useless—to paraphrase Marx, two sums of money can only differ in their amount—but they are also inevitable, and I feel very small when I make them.

Writing makes a place for feeling and experience in excess of everyday life. Were it not for writing, I wouldn’t know what to do with that excess. Because of it, I answer Rilke’s interrogation—whether “in the most silent hour of your night” I must write—with an assured assent. And yet, more than a few people have told me that I look and act nothing like the sort of person who lives with and after a terrible tragedy. I’m really a happy sort of person, they say, big and friendly, a lawyer or a salesman. My wife calls me “the world’s only type-A poet.” And it’s true. I’m very good at doing practical things. My blue jeans, oxfords, and sneakers are very unliterary.

Anything committed to paper and memory cannot be said for the first time again. It can only be repeated. I’ve spent so much of the last nine years (nearly a quarter of my life) writing about grief and guilt, absence and love and their resonance, and I am surprised to find these subjects so durable. Such hyper-articulateness is a way of marking time, too. Even today, remarried, a father, living in northern California, happy and blessed and exhausted, my writing marks out two directions: before and after Katie’s death. I believe that I can move the fulcrum of my life toward what I love a little more with the new things I write. Which is to say, I write in order to live and love honestly.

John W. Evans is a Jones Lecturer in creative writing at Stanford University. His newest book is Should I Still Wish: A Memoir. He is the author of Young Widower: A Memoir (Nebraska, 2014), winner of the River Teeth Literary Nonfiction Prize; The Consolations, winner of the 2015 Peace Corps Writers Best Poetry Book; and two poetry chapbooks.
As we wind down our 75th anniversary year—which has been replete with some very rewarding and amazing events and publications—I think it appropriate to reflect on what the next 75 years might bring us.

While many may think that there won’t be traditional books in 75 years, I continue to believe that while information will be delivered in a number of different ways, physical, printed books will always be one of those ways. Why is that?

First, it turns out print books are actually easier to read than those in electronic formats. True, they may weigh more and may not have a “search” function. They are also bulkier, and it’s hard to take more than one at a time when you travel. But there are things that make a print book easier to use than its electronic cousin. You can stick your finger between two pages while you flip back to see what you’ve already read or flip ahead to the index, notes, or the back cover of the book. You can make notes (yes, I write in books!) right in the margins or highlight passages in the text. I have friends in my book club who are the masters of tiny Post-It notes. They arrive at book club, physical books in hand, little flags sticking out of the sides and tops.

You can shelve them in your house. I’m proud of my bookshelves at home, where fiction is alphabetized by author last name and nonfiction is by subject area. When we downsize in a few years, many of these books will have to find new homes—I’m thinking about you A Novel Idea Bookstore! In recent years, I have been mostly buying ebooks, but I do miss the ritual of shelving a book after I’ve read it. Here at work, I’m fortunate to receive one copy of each new Press book; when they arrive, I shelve them, alphabetical by author last name. Staffers who need to get their hands on a copy of a book are told to “please steal my book”—otherwise, I will run out of room! But it’s such a joy to look over my computer monitor and see four floor-to-ceiling bookshelves, each jammed with UNP, Potomac, Bison, and JPS books. After all, books more than anything else are what make me love my job.

Our 75th anniversary year is wrapping up. It’s not too late to make a donation to our Friends group. I can’t grant any of us immortality to see if printed books will still be with us 75 years from now, but I know that if we all continue to support the University of Nebraska Press, the scholarship, creativity, and fine work of our authors and staff will live on.
his managers. He also told, in beautiful detail, what it was like to journey into space on the first flight of the Apollo spacecraft, the vehicle that would take humans all the way to the moon on the very next mission. He was immensely proud of what he had accomplished. However, he did not live long enough to add more to his memoirs. With Susie’s permission, I began turning Donn’s writings into a manuscript.

Once I had carefully edited the numerous drafts into one, Susie Eisele Black read it and told me that it was as if her late husband was still alive, speaking directly to her. I hope this is a sensation every reader feels as they experience this long-overlooked memoir, vividly telling us all what it was like to journey into space aboard an Apollo, with all its glory and frustrations. Dry technical reports could never capture the feeling of being in the heart of the space program; for all of the program’s engineering triumphs, this is a very human story.

Rob Taylor:

When I first saw this project, the backstory of Francis finding it in draft form among Eisele’s papers made it stand out initially—but it’s Donn’s story that will surprise and engage spaceflight history readers. Not only is it the lost memoir of an Apollo astronaut, it is a firsthand account of the first Apollo mission to carry a crew into space. Unlike his contemporaries, Eisele began recording his experiences and thoughts while still in the spaceflight program, and his writings are therefore some of the freshest and most candid ever written by an astronaut. This is a book that many space fans might have hoped would’ve been written during the Apollo program but wasn’t available until now.

Apollo Pilot is the newest title in the long-running and popular series Outward Odyssey: A People's History of Spaceflight.
The University of Nebraska Press joins with all those in our university community to mourn the passing of Prem Paul, who as vice chancellor for research and economic development oversaw the Press. He believed strongly in the Press, and in the arts in general, and he always promoted and touted the good works we do here at UNP. He was proud of the books we published—using many of them as gifts to visiting dignitaries. He supported all of our efforts to be innovative and bold—whether it was entering into the agreement with the Jewish Publication Society, or purchasing Potomac Books, or negotiating the return of *Black Elk Speaks* and the other works of John G. Neihardt to UNP.

In announcing that he was stepping down as vice chancellor, just days before his death, he said, “Serving this university . . . has been the highlight of my career. I am indebted to the many faculty members and staff. . . . It has been an honor to witness your achievements and to watch you dream bigger.”

It has been an honor to witness Dr. Paul’s achievements and to watch how he taught all of us to dream bigger. We will miss him dearly.
Over the past seventy-five years, the University of Nebraska Press has published many well-known and outstanding authors—from Willa Cather to Mari Sandoz to John Neihardt to, of course, Ted Kooser. All of them had to start somewhere.

To celebrate our diamond jubilee this year, UNP gave up-and-coming young writers the opportunity to join these authors’ ranks through a literary contest. Nebraska college students and high school seniors were invited to submit pieces on the theme of diversity in Nebraska. From these submissions, nineteen writers were chosen to have their individual works of poetry, fiction, and nonfiction published in the new anthology *Voices of Nebraska: Diverse Landscapes, Diverse Peoples*. These newly published writers were presented with a finished copy of the anthology at UNP’s anniversary party on November 17. Five highlighted writers also received a $75 award.

Award winners are: Thaddeus Simpson of Omaha, for three works of poetry; Lane Chasek of Lincoln, for his nonfiction “Becoming Vegan in Western Nebraska”; Catherine Pedigo of Omaha, for her fiction “Cottonwood”; Daniel McIlhon of Clive, Iowa, for three works of poetry; and Kristi Walsh of Omaha, for her fiction “Release.”

**IN MEMORIAM**

**James E. Potter**

1945–2016

Senior research historian at the Nebraska State Historical Society and author of the UNP book *Standing Firmly by the Flag: Nebraska Territory and the Civil War, 1861–1867.*
Hundreds gathered in Bancroft, Nebraska, for the annual Neihardt Day, which featured Tim Anderson talking about the life of John G. Neihardt. Anderson is the author of *Lonesome Dreamer*, the new UNP biography of Neihardt.

Join Friends of UNP today and receive a complimentary copy of *Lonesome Dreamer*. 
UNP celebrates 75 years!

On November 17, more than 200 authors, friends, and Press staff gathered at a gala event that capped a year-long celebration of UNP’s 75th anniversary.

We’d like to thank all who celebrated with us as well as the many people and organizations who have supported UNP over the years.
THANK YOU TO OUR LOCAL BOOKSTORES

As part of our 75th anniversary celebration, UNP collaborated with four bookstores in Lincoln to connect with readers and raise the Press’s visibility in our community. Events were held during the course of the year at A Novel Idea, Indigo Bridge, the UNL Bookstore, and one of the two Lincoln Barnes & Noble locations.

HAVE YOU MOVED RECENTLY?

Authors, we could use your help. Every year when we send out our yearly royalty statements, many of them are returned to us by the Post Office as undeliverable. Please be sure to notify the Press when you have a change of address. You may call it in to 402-472-3581, email it to pressmail@unl.edu, or send it to University of Nebraska Press, 1111 Lincoln Mall, Lincoln, NE 68588.
Ann McGrath won the 2016 New South Wales Premier’s History Award in the category of General History for her book *Illicit Love: Interracial Sex and Marriage in the United States and Australia*. This award, given by the NSW government, comes with a $15,000 prize for the author.

McGrath and her book also won the John Douglas Kerr Medal for Distinction in Research and Writing Australia History, given by the Royal Historical Society of Queensland. This award is one of Queensland’s most prestigious and recognizes a recipient’s demonstrated excellence in historical research in Queensland or Australian history in general.

Four UNP books won 2016 Nebraska Book Awards. *The Ordinary Spaceman: From Boyhood Dreams to Astronaut* by Clayton C. Anderson took the award for Creative Nonfiction. *This Strange Wilderness: The Life and Art of John James Audubon* by Nancy Plain earned the award in the Children/Young Adult category. *In Cold Storage: Sex and Murder on the Plains* by James W. Hewitt garnered the Nonfiction (True Crime) award. *Nebrasketball: Coach Tim Miles and a Big Ten Team on the Rise* by Scott Winter won the award for Nonfiction (Current Biography).
In Sun’s Likeness and Power: Cheyenne Accounts of Shield and Tipi Heraldry by James Mooney, transcribed and edited by Father Peter J. Powell, won the 2016 Waldo G. Leland Prize. The American Historical Association awards this prize every five years to the most outstanding reference tool in the field of history.


She Can Bring Us Home: Dr. Dorothy Boulding Ferebee, Civil Rights Pioneer by Diane Kiesel won the 2016 Colonial Dames of America Book Award.

The Colonel and Hug: The Partnership that Transformed the New York Yankees by Steve Steinberg and Lyle Spatz won a 2016 SABR Baseball Research Award.

No Confession, No Mass by Jennifer Perrine won the 2016 Audre Lorde Award for Lesbian Poetry from The Publishing Triangle.

Falafel Nation: Cuisine and the Making of National Identity in Israel by Yael Raviv made the shortlist for the 2016 Gourmand World Cookbooks Awards.

Amina Gautier’s debut collection of stories, Now We Will Be Happy, was a finalist for the 2016 William Saroyan International Prize for Writing, given by Stanford University Libraries.

John Schulian, author of Sometimes They Even Shook Your Hand and Twilight of the Long-ball Gods, won the 2016 PEN/ESPN Lifetime Achievement Award for Literary Sports Writing. The award is given to one living American or U.S.-based writer each year to celebrate his or her body of work. It seeks to recognize a lifetime of knowledgeable and insightful writing about sports and its dimensions of character and action, especially with a literary voice evidenced in a style of agility and flair.
Cannibal by Safiya Sinclair

“[A] stunning debut collection. . . . Through her visceral language Sinclair paints the institution of white supremacy as not just an individualized phenomenon, but as a ruthless and menacing force.”—Publishers Weekly (starred review)

“Reading (and rereading) Sinclair is an urgently necessary, absolutely unparalleled experience.”—Booklist (starred review)

BuzzFeed Books included Cannibal on its list of “21 Incredible New Books You Need To Read This Fall.”

Crude Nation: How Oil Riches Ruined Venezuela by Raúl Gallegos

“A timely, important book. . . . Sharply written and vividly detailed, the book documents how Venezuela’s oil reserves—the world’s largest—subsidize an unsustainable life for its citizens.”—Publishers Weekly
Amiable Scoundrel: Simon Cameron, Lincoln’s Scandalous Secretary of War by Paul Kahan

“This book is essential for any civil war historian’s library.”—San Francisco Book Review

Harry and Arthur: Truman, Vandenberg, and the Partnership That Created the Free World by Lawrence J. Haas

“Mr. Haas, a former communications director for Vice President Al Gore, writes with an admirable lightness of touch and a command of detail that is enhanced by his insider knowledge of how Congress and the White House operate.”—Richard Aldous, Wall Street Journal

Dodgerland: Decadent Los Angeles and the 1977–78 Dodgers by Michael Fallon

“Not a conventional championship-season kind of treatment but a thoughtful, comprehensive, and even deeply personal account of a boisterous era whose echoes remain loud, even painful.”—Kirkus

Haters: Harassment, Abuse, and Violence Online by Bailey Poland

“A must-have for feminists and women and gender studies classrooms everywhere.”—Library Journal

Redskins: Insult and Brand by C. Richard King

“[An] insightful, must-read book.”—Chicago Tribune
The JPS Bible Commentary: Song of Songs by Michael Fishbane

“This multilayered commentary makes for an absorbing, enriching and satisfying immersion in this endlessly fascinating Song.”
—Jewish Book Council

Daniel M. Horwitz and his book A Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism Reader were featured in Forward, the Kansas City Jewish Chronicle, the Jewish Herald-Voice (Houston), and New Books Network, among other outlets.
Critically acclaimed sociopolitical comedian W. Kamau Bell posted on Instagram about *Striking Distance: Bruce Lee and the Dawn of Martial Arts in America* by Charles Russo. Bell commented that the book “solidifies Bruce Lee’s place in martial arts, pop culture, and history while at the same time demonstrating that there was a good reason Bruce was a walking legend in his brief time on this planet” (https://www.instagram.com/p/BG-Da3-ijTG/).
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The Friends of UNP continues its commitment to support conversion of older UNP titles to electronic format so that readers may enjoy them either in print or as ebooks. Additionally, Friends directly underwrites publication costs of several new books each season. In fall 2016 the Friends group supported The Turtle’s Beating Heart: One Family’s Story of Lenape Survival by Denise Low and Stories from Afield: Adventures with Wild Things in Wild Places by Bruce L. Smith.

Help Friends reach its 2016 goal of 75 gifts for 75 years. Join or renew today and support great reading from Nebraska!
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Several UNP staff members pose for a photo on Halloween.