

AUTHOR NEWSLETTER

Herb Hughes

First Quarter, 2020

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

Everybody complains about how fast time flies as you get older. But time is time, so that's silly, right? Well, yes and no. There is actually something to that, or at least, to the perception of it.

As you age, your metabolism slows down. Your rate of metabolism is tied to your perception of time. So, as you get older, you perceive that time is going faster. While time may not actually be changing, perception is everything. It might as well be flying by on full throttle since we perceive it as faster. (Says a lot for exercising, eating right, and boosting your metabolism!)

In my personal perception of time, what I've noticed recently is how fast a bimonthly newsletter comes around. 😊 So I have decided to change to a quarterly newsletter. Because it takes months to write a novel, a quarterly newsletter makes better sense.

I've also added a new feature, a recipe section. Yes, I enjoy cooking. After a hard day of pounding the keyboard, a beer and a cooktop help to ease the tension. The amount of tension depends on the tension in the scenes I'm working on. I get very involved with my stories. Cooking can help tear away that tension and settle me back down into the real world.

I received some very nice comments from my first newsletter. I hope you enjoy this one as well. As always, any feedback is greatly appreciated. Thank you!

WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Notices about my revised author website were sent out separately. As a recap, my son, Stephen, added a page called SHOP, where you can order autographed paperbacks of my novels. You can also send them as gifts anywhere in the United States for the prices shown. I would be happy to ship overseas, but I have sent books to a number of friends overseas, and the cost of mailing is fairly expensive. If you wish to gift someone outside the United States, message me on Facebook or at my author email: herb@tennesseeyankeenovel.com.



We have also added specially priced book sets, including a package with all five of my novels. The prices on these sets have been reduced as much as possible to make them more affordable. A full set of my autographed paperbacks is \$69.95, which includes shipping. Ordering the five books separately would total \$100.75. By ordering the set, you save \$30.80.

I have revived the Facebook page for the Drake Blast Novels. With the second novel coming out soon, and the third and fourth in the oven, it made good sense to give Drake his own page. And website, too. Stephen and I are planning a Drake Blast website and hope to have it operational this spring in conjunction with the release of *The Great Brain Robbery*.

So far, I have avoided Twitter. In today's dramatically changed book environment, an author has to use every method available for spreading the word about his novels, so that may not last.

FEATURE ARTICLE – HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO WRITE A NOVEL?

The most common question people ask me is: "How long does it take to write a novel?" That's a very good question. There's not a simple "one-size-fits-all" answer. It varies from novel to novel. It also varies from author to author.

My first novel, *Tennessee Yankee*, took well over 4,000 hours to write. It is probably closer to 6,000 hours. I cannot give a definitive answer. I started writing it way back in the 70's, and tinkered with it off and on over the decades. It's been rewritten so many times all I can do is make a rough estimate of the time spent.

Even after it was first published, I worked on the book for hundreds of additional hours. The initial ending was depressing. I never liked it. Not long after it was published, I came up with a different ending, one that required substantial rewriting throughout the book. So I spent hundreds more hours working on the current version than republished. (More on this in the *Blast From The Past* section that follows.)

My most recent novel, *Conecuh*, is also historical fiction about the civil war. Even with substantial research help from others, as noted in the book, I spent a considerable amount of time performing research, probably close to two hundred hours. My total time working on *Conecuh* was in the 1,800 to 2,000 hour range. (I don't punch a clock, but that should be pretty close.)

My Science Fiction novel, *Killing Rhinos*, is another book that started decades ago. It has been rewritten many times over the years based on everything I learned from reading the work of masters in the field. My plot changed for the better time and time again. I'm sure I have well over 4,000 hours in this novel, too. The final published story is dramatically different from the original version.

The first Drake Blast novel, *The Joystick Murders*, took longer than I was expecting. I had to set the tone and the premise for the entire series, so it was longer than future Drake Blast novels will be. At this point, I've got about 2,000 hours in it, but that will go up. Now that I am nearing completion on the second Drake Blast novel, I have decided that these novels need to be shorter

to have a greater “punch” with the reader. Once *The Great Brain Robbery* is published, I will attempt to shorten *The Joystick Murders* by removing any “fluff” that doesn’t speed the plot along. My goal is to reduce the number of words by 15% to 20%. That may be optimistic. There’s a certain amount of “establishment” that needs to be done in the first book even though all the *Drake Blast* novels will be self-contained, each plot a standalone so that they can be read in any order.

Finally, I’ve got about 1,200 hours in *A Bloody Wonderful War*. That is for the novel only. It does not include the time I spent writing the screenplay, as that is how the story started its life. If I had not had the screenplay to work from, I suspect I would have spent a few hundred hours more on the novel.

I can only speak for other writers based on what I have read, heard, and observed over the years. Several “big name” writers say that it takes about a year to write a novel. I even read a comment from one major author who said anyone putting out more than a novel a year was a “hack” writer. At the same time, some very well-known authors are publishing two, three, and even more books a year. I’m sure they don’t consider themselves “hacks.”

James Patterson, one of the most prolific American novelists, has published as many as four or five books a year. But, if you read James Patterson novels, you will notice that he almost always has another author listed as a collaborator. Essentially, the other authors do the actual writing. He creates the story and proofs the work as it goes along. His system works. His novels are usually well-crafted and very entertaining.

It was said that the great Isaac Asimov bought his typewriter paper on a roll. He planned out his novel then sat down at the typewriter. By the time the roll had gone through, the novel was finished. His publishers stated that he wrote finished copy in the first draft. He must have. He either wrote or edited more than 500 books in his career usually without a collaborator. To my knowledge, nobody has ever confessed to being a ghost writer for him.

One of the modern masters of Science Fiction, Peter F. Hamilton, typically writes only one novel a year, but he must work like a slave because his novels are in the thousand page range, the word count equivalent of three novels a year. I love his work, but I must admit it is a commitment to read one of his novels.

Another issue that affects the time spent writing a novel is how much work the author is willing to put into one story. I am a bit of a perfectionist by nature, so I go through a novel dozens, even hundreds of times trying to refine it, to make the wording better and to insure plot continuity. I believe that all the time spent makes my novels better than average, and the reviews back me up, but it also causes some issues. I sometime miss deadlines because I am still reworking the story. And my rewriting will sometimes introduce new typos AFTER the novel has gone through my extensive editing process. I don’t have the heart to ask my four editors to go through the novel a second time because it’s a lot of work. So if I don’t catch the new typos, they end up in the published book.

I hate it, but there are a few in each of my novels. I typically don't go back and reread a book after it's published, but if someone brings it to my attention, I'll make the modifications. After a sufficient number of revisions pile up, I'll revise the master on Amazon and mark it as the next printing.

So the amount of time an author spends on a novel varies greatly among authors and among different books from a single author. Generally, for an average size book (~100,000 words) an author working alone and performing a reasonable number of iterations through the book will spend somewhere in the 1,000 to 2,000 hour range.

What does the author make for his or her effort? That's a sad story, indeed! Well over 90% of the novelists in America make less than minimum wage, and the majority of us make pennies per hour instead of dollars. Yes, a handful get rich. These, however, are extremely few and far between. It's a labor of love for the rest of us!

NEXT ISSUE: What is Science Fiction? (It's not as simple as the name implies.)

POUNDING THE KEYS – THE GREAT BRAIN ROBBERY

[Pounding The Keys is a regular feature about my current novel in progress.]



The rough draft of The Great Brain Robbery is now complete. (If you would like a synopsis of the story, go to the BLOG page of my website, www.herbhughesnovels.com, and read my first newsletter.)

Now the real work starts! I will go completely through the novel at least another dozen times, refining the writing and shoring up plot continuity. As I write a rough, I am constantly going back and working on earlier chapters, so I have already gone through the book at least a dozen times, some scenes several dozen times.

Once the rewriting is completed, my extensive editing process starts. I have four editors. All four will look at both the story and the writing. I send the book to the first three then make their changes before sending to the fourth and final editor. A great friend from my Intergraph days, Marilyn Parker, is the guard over the last gate.

Once I've finished making Marilyn's changes, I input the text into Grammarly as a final sanity check. This is where my major weakness comes in. Can anybody say OCD? Yes, as I make the last of the editorial changes, I make further refinements without going through the editing process again. This can and often does introduce more typos. But I promise I am going to work really hard on not doing that in the future. Wish me luck! 😊

I hope The Great Brain Robbery will be released by the time you receive the second quarter newsletter. It should be available on Amazon in February or March 2020. (Translation: April.)

JUST FOR FUN

[Since we've gone quarterly, we'll go with two writer's jokes for the price of one this issue.]

First:

There was once a young man who, in his youth, professed his desire to become a great writer.

When asked to define "Great" he said, "I want to write stuff that the whole world will read, stuff that people will react to on a truly emotional level, stuff that will make them scream, cry, howl in pain and anger!"

He now works for Microsoft, writing error messages.

Second:

A visitor to a certain college paused to admire the new Hemingway Hall that had been built on campus.

"It's a pleasure to see a building named for Ernest Hemingway," he said.

"Actually," said his guide, "it's named for Joshua Hemingway. No relation."

The visitor was astonished. "Was Joshua Hemingway a writer, also?"

"Yes, indeed," said his guide. "He wrote a check."

BLAST FROM THE PAST

[For the first five issues of my newsletter, I will feature one of my published novels, at random, and discuss where the idea came from, how it developed, and why I wanted to write it.]

TENNESSEE YANKEE

As mentioned earlier in this newsletter, my first novel, Tennessee Yankee, started way back in the 70's. Some time back I wrote that the novel originated in a dark period of my life. On further reflection, however, that's not totally true. I've had some difficult periods to be sure, and the idea was born from the difficulties I was facing at the time, but to call this a "dark period" is a bit of a

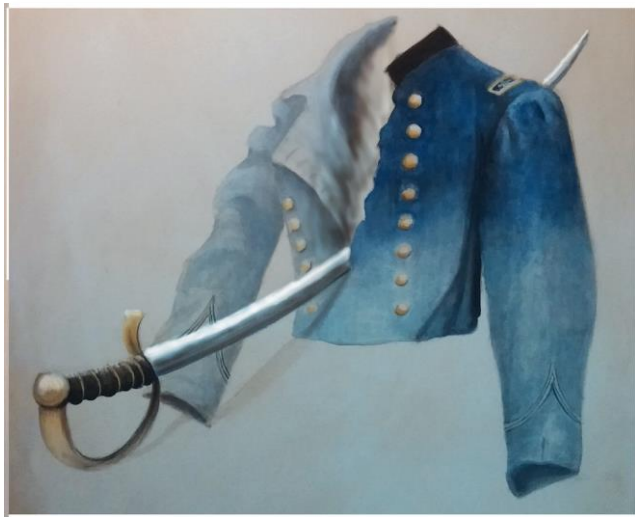
misnomer. I am typically a happy person. I can find something to laugh about in the tough times. I have enjoyed life even when things were crumbling around me.



But because the book was born in, perhaps, my most difficult time, the original ending was depressing. While life got much better (especially after I met Charlotte!) I stuck with the original story as I wrote and rewrote over the decades. (In all honesty, the manuscript did more hiding as a stack of handwritten pages in a suitcase that I moved with me every time I changed residence. I actually worked on it very little.) The original title was *The First Snow*. Pretty dull, eh?

Once I sold my business, *Huntsville Hardscapes*, I became serious about my lifelong desire to write novels. I pulled out the old manuscript, by now a computer file as I taught myself to type years earlier at Intergraph Corporation. I changed the title to *Tennessee Yankee* and finished the novel. The first version, with the depressing ending, was published through a British company called Lulu.

It sold a few copies, but hardcovers are expensive. While I was never happy with the ending, that was not the worst problem. Much to my dismay, I discovered later that the published version was the original unedited manuscript. Somehow I managed to not save the edited version. Unfortunately, there was some very rough writing in the published book.



I had no choice but to make extensive revisions. As I began to work, I had a “shower revelation.” (I often get my best story and plot ideas while taking a shower.) A new and far better ending revealed itself to me. The new ending required that I perform extensive rewriting of the story to set it up, so it essentially became a new novel.

After some research, I felt that Amazon was a better outlet than Lulu, at least for me. I decided on two formats, eBook and paperback. eBooks are the future and paperbacks are much less expensive than hardcover for those of us who still like the feel of real books.

The first version was taken out of print. The “new” *Tennessee Yankee* was placed on Amazon and it continues to be my best-selling novel, though *Conecuh* is quickly catching up.

The basic premise for the story is one that was all too common during the civil war, the conflict not only on the field of battle but also in the homes of Americans from border to border. The civil war split the loyalties of many families. Sometimes it split the loyalties of a single person. One such person was Aaron Richardson, the Tennessee Yankee.

Many hundreds of hours of research went into Tennessee Yankee. Every idea I had for the story had to be researched to ensure that something of that nature had actually happened. Even though my book was fiction, I wanted a truly authentic feel. As an example, I wanted to have a scene where brother met brother on the battlefield, one in gray and one in blue. As it turns out, there were over a hundred documented cases of this happening. Another example is the names of sharpshooter rifles in the book are authentic, as is the fact that many southern sharpshooters used custom-made target rifles instead of a manufactured weapon. The South had difficulty getting highly accurate, long range rifles through the blockade. In many cases, the custom-made rifles were even better. And quite long. It was not unusual for the rifle to stand taller than the soldier carrying it.

You can read the short description of the novel, and the first few pages, by clicking on the Amazon link below.

I am very proud of Tennessee Yankee, particularly as it was my first novel. It continues to get excellent reviews and ratings. If you read the book, I hope you enjoyed it. If you have not read it, I invite you to do so. I believe you will enjoy it.

Tennessee Yankee

288 Pages

Formats:

eBook \$2.99

Paperback \$14.95

Available for free to Kindle Unlimited subscribers

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B01M3YDQYY>

Average Ratings:

11 Amazon ratings – ***** 5.0 out of 5 stars

16 Goodreads ratings – **** 4.0 out of 5 stars

Editorial Reviews:

Reader's Favorite – ***** 5.0 out of 5 stars

“This is a highly engaging read and a great novel that I would definitely recommend!”

HERB'S COOKING CORNER

[Most of my personal recipes are derived from other recipes. Sometimes I make only a few changes. Sometimes I make so many changes the original dish seems to have disappeared. I like one-pan meals, where veggies, carbs, and protein are all together. You can come up with some very nice taste mixes that way.]

CREAMY STREAMY SPAGHETTI

Ingredients

1 lb. hamburger
1/2 lb. mild or regular sausage
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 cup shredded carrots 1 medium or large red pepper, finely chopped
1 small or medium green pepper, finely chopped
8 ounces dry spaghetti broken into thirds (thin preferred, but regular is fine)
3 cups water
1 cup heavy cream
1/2 teaspoons kosher salt
1/4 teaspoon garlic powder
1 cup shredded Parmesan cheese

Ingredient Notes

OLIVE OIL: A word to the wise about olive oil: Some of the ancients called olive trees “medicine trees.” Olive oil was believed to have medicinal powers. (Perhaps that’s why so many people live to ninety and even a hundred in the Mediterranean region.) But many popular brands of olive oil sold in America have other types of oil in them. They do this to keep costs down so they can compete more effectively, but these additional oils are NOT as healthy. I prefer California Ranch Olive Oil, but there are many good brands available. A little research on the web will help you find olive oil brands that are actually 100% olive oil.

SAUSAGE: Mild or regular sausage is recommended. Hot or spicy sausage can introduce flavors that will clash with the other spices and ingredients. This is not intended to be a spicy dish. The flavors are wonderful but somewhat subtle.

SHREDDED CARROTS: You can shred your own, but the pre-shredded packages save a lot of work!

HEAVY CREAM: I’ve discovered that, while heavy whipping cream is plentiful, heavy cream is a little more difficult to find. They are not the same though many people will tell you they are. Heavy whipping cream is fine if you can’t find heavy cream, but use a little less, maybe 3/4 or 7/8 of a cup.

KOSHER SALT: Regular salt is fine, but next time you’re in the grocery store, pick up some kosher salt. It’s better for cooking.

Directions

1. In a LARGE skillet, brown the hamburger and sausage then drain well.
2. Add the olive oil and heat over medium-high heat until the oil is shimmering.
3. Add the carrots and cook about two minutes, stirring occasionally, until slightly softened.
4. Add the chopped peppers and cook one minute more.
5. Add the water, heavy cream, salt, and garlic powder then stir to mix.
6. Add the spaghetti. Make sure the spaghetti and the veggies are under water. Press down with a cooking spoon or spatula. Cover and cook on a low boil for 8 minutes.
7. Uncover and cook, stirring constantly, until the pasta is al dente. Usually about 3 or 4 minutes more.

8. Turn off the burner. If you are using an electric cooktop, remove from the heat source. Stir in the Parmesan cheese and serve immediately.

9. Sprinkles – If desired, you can sprinkle the top with: additional Parmesan cheese, cherry tomatoes, chopped tomatoes, bacon bits, or a few finely chopped green and/or red peppers. ENJOY!!!

RECENT REVIEWS – THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE SUBLIME

[This section covers the reviews/ratings of my novels posted in November and December, 2019. Future issues will cover the prior quarter. Readers have many different viewpoints, tastes, and opinions. I respect that and, as a personal rule, do not comment on any specific review.]

Tennessee Yankee

Goodreads Rating by Gail H. Duncan
November 21, 2019
***** 5 out of 5 stars

Conecuh

Amazon Review by Missy
December 31, 2019
Format: Kindle Edition
***** 5 out of 5 stars
:)

Amazon Review by Henry Kinsler
November 12, 2019
***** 5 out of 5 stars
A very good novel. It was engaging from the beginning to the end. A must read for Civil War buffs.

Goodreads Rating by Paat
December 26, 2019
***** 5 out of 5 stars

Goodreads Rating by Jamie Grecco
December 26, 2019
***** 5 out of 5 stars

The Joystick Murders

Amazon Review by Stephen
December 7, 2019

***** 5 out of 5 stars

This was the first book I've been able to finish in 5 years.

Really loved all the future tech! The author has definitely done his research and seems to have an eye for tech's flow into the future.

The scenes were crafted nicely. Very easy to set yourself in the story, BUT not overdone description like Tolkien :p

Overall a great who-dunnit and I can't wait to see what happens in the next book!

There were only six reviews in November and December 2019, but they were all five star reviews. That makes my average pretty good. 😊

Thank you for reading my newsletter. I greatly appreciate each and every one of you.

I need your help to spread the word about my novels to a wider audience. I am receiving great reviews and comments, but with millions of books out there, getting mine in front of the people who would want to read them is extremely difficult. **PLEASE PASS THIS NEWSLETTER ALONG TO FRIENDS AND FAMILY, and ask them to do the same. Thank you.**

If you would like to receive my newsletters, please send your name and email address to either:
herb@tennesseeyankeenovel.com or herbhughes1994@att.net.

Please remember to add these addresses to your safe senders list to avoid them going into your Junk Email folder.

If you no longer wish to receive my emails, please reply with STOP in the subject line or the message body and you will be promptly removed from my mailing list.

Thank you,
Herb Hughes