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AUTHOR NEWSLETTER

Herb Hughes

Fourth Quarter, 2020

BOOK SALES

Three of my novels fit into genres: Tennessee Yankee and Conecuh in historical fiction and Killing Rhinos in science fiction. They continue to sell well even though Tennessee Yankee is four years old and Killing Rhinos is three years old. All three are neck and neck (and neck) in sales volume.



As of November 1, 2020, Killing Rhinos is my best seller, but it's less than a hundred books ahead of Conecuh and Tennessee Yankee, which are in a virtual tie for second. Conecuh has caught up with the other two in a little over a year and may overtake the others in the near future.

Winning an international award (Conecuh: Bronze Medal – 2020 eLit Awards) has made a significant impact on sales. Interestingly, this has not been exclusively for the novel that won the award. There has been a substantial jump in sales for Tennessee Yankee and Killing Rhinos as well. I have also seen a small increase for my other three novels, but not significant.

A Bloody Wonderful War and the two Drake Blast novels have not sold well. They are unique but do not fit neatly into a genre. I have read several articles which state today's readers tend to be more genre-oriented than in years past. Sales of these books back that up. So, for the foreseeable future, I am working on genre books only. A War With God (article below) is science fiction and will be published in January 2021. The drawing board has one historical fiction novel and two science fiction novels on it.

Sadly, because of the significantly lower sales of the Drake Blast novels (particularly the most recent, The Great Brain Robbery) Drake has gone into suspended animation. Yes, this is disappointing. I would love to finish A War By Any Other Name, but I cannot justify the 1,200 to 1,500 hours of work until Drake makes some sort of breakthrough with the reading public.

If you have any feedback for future novels, or anything else, send me an email at herbhughes1994@att.net. I would love to hear your opinion.

POUNDING THE KEYS – A WAR WITH GOD

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

The rough draft of A War With God was completed in October. I have since gone through the entire novel twice then passed it along to my first reader, the beautiful and brilliant Dr. Charlotte Hughes. Her read is more for story and continuity than for grammatical errors. When we finish discussing, I will make anywhere from three to ten more revision/correction passes through the book. When I get to the point where virtually no changes are required, that's the final pass. (This takes a while because I'm a perfectionist at heart. And it irritates me no end that I have yet to publish a book that was totally typo-free.)

[A short note: As you might expect, with each novel I have published, I'm finding that my first draft is more and more polished, and that it takes fewer revision/correction passes to get to the point where I am making virtually no changes.]

Next, I have a lengthy list of pet words and phrases that I tend to use when pounding out the rough draft. These are words that should be avoided in a published novel. (Such as 'really,' 'very,' 'just,' etc.) I search for the occurrences of each word and consider rephrasing.

After that, the book is run through Grammarly. Grammarly is great, but it is tedious and time-consuming. I have to work myself up for the Grammarly review. An average size novel will take four or five days to complete.

The novel is now ready to go to my next two readers, Sherry Garner and Alabama author Myra Singleton Johnson. Once I make their changes, I send to my final reader, Marilyn Parker. Much to my dismay, Marilyn still finds things this late in the process. One of these days, I'm going to fool her by sending a novel that is so perfect she won't have anything to mark! (Maybe...)

It will be another month or so before A War With God is published. I'm madly rushing to get the book into the hands of the IPPY and eLit Award judges before their February deadline while still taking the time to make the book the best it can be. Lots of hours!

JUST FOR FUN

[Writer's jokes. Something to help you smile.]

What do you call a writer who doesn't follow the rules of sentence structure?

A rebel without a clause.

Did you hear about the writer who became a baker?

They say he makes excellent synonym rolls.

What do you call a place where everyone's a writer?

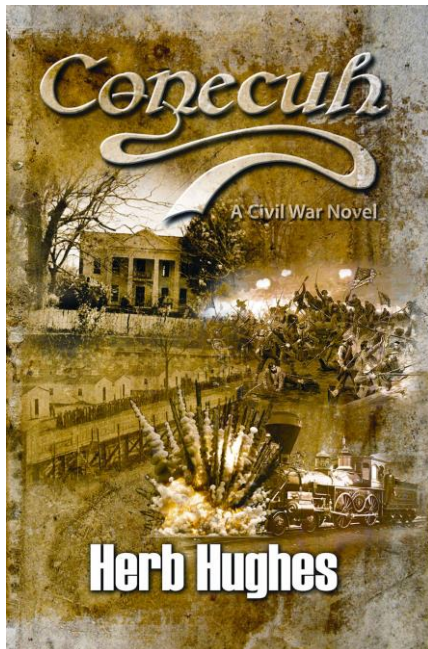
A writer's block.

Have you heard about the rapper's ghost writer going to jail?

He was behind bars.

BLAST FROM THE PAST

[This issue catches us up to the present, so this feature will no longer appear in future newsletters.]



The Blast From the Past for this issue is my latest historical fiction novel, Conecuh. Part of the story behind this novel was covered in my Q3 2020 newsletter when it won an international award. This article presents the full story.

My cousin, Sherry Hughes Garner, is one of my readers. Her husband is John Garner. When we were working on another book, she told me the story of John's great uncle, Caleb Garner, and his experiences during the civil war. It was an interesting story, but I had too many novels already floating around in my head, so I shelved the idea.

Later, Sherry and her daughter, Robin Robinson, sent me their genealogical research material on Caleb's life. It was amazing what he went through over a three year period. He fought in most of the major battles, was wounded twice, and was held in three different Federal prisons. In late 1864, he was a part of an "invalid" prison exchange. Almost four

thousand Prisoners from Elmira (the notorious 'Hellmira') Prison in New York were shipped to Venus Point in South Carolina, just across the river from Savannah, Georgia, where they were exchanged for four thousand Federal soldiers, most of whom were in as bad or worse shape after their imprisonment in the notorious Andersonville.

Caleb's trip home was complicated because General Sherman destroyed the railroad tracks from Savannah to Macon as his men burned their way through Georgia. The General lay siege to Savannah just a few days after the prisoner exchange. Because of this, it took six months for Caleb to reach home. Although he arrived in Conecuh County on a train, much of the trip had to be covered on foot since the tracks had been ripped up and coiled into "Sherman's neckties."

Caleb Garner arrived in Conecuh County, Alabama, on the very day that Union Colonel Andrew Spurling raided the county. Caleb, along with a hundred Confederate regulars, was arrested after a short skirmish when the train was halted. Because he had his exchange papers, his arrest was recorded then he was released to go home.

According to public records, that is the end of Caleb's story. I found it so interesting that I was hooked, but I needed to give Caleb an ending since history had failed to do so. If he died soon after he got home, there should be a record. There isn't. If he lived in or near Conecuh County for the next few years, there should be a record. There isn't. The last record of Caleb is his release in Owassa, Alabama, by the Union raiders. There is nothing to show that he returned to his parent's home, where he lived before the war. He was in his mid-twenties, so he may have lived for many more years. But where? And how did he leave? Was he alone or with someone else?

It was intriguing. I wondered... *What if Caleb had a girl who loved him, who was willing to travel anywhere and endure numerous hardships to find him and bring him home?* Emily Rose poofed into existence. She was a strong but emotional woman, someone who would travel the world to save her fiancé. Since ladies rarely traveled alone in that era, especially in a country ravaged by war, Nathaniel Whiteeagle, a slave with Cherokee blood, popped into the story to accompany her. Of course, their simple train ride from south Alabama to Richmond, Virginia, was a travel nightmare because of Union raids and an almost lawless south in some areas.

Once *A Bloody Wonderful War* was published, I immediately began working on Conecuh. A couple of months later, halfway through the first draft, John and Sherry discovered that a genealogist had made a mistake, that they might not be related to Caleb after all. By then, however, I was hooked on Caleb's story. Great uncle or not, the novel had to be written!

There is an old saying that it 'takes a village to raise a child.' That can also be said about the creation of most historical fiction novels. There are many people in the village that created Conecuh. Sherry, John, and Robin provided me tons of research related to Caleb's story. Sherry Johnston, Historian/Archivist at the Evergreen – Conecuh Public Library, provided a lot of relevant material as well. She was also the proverbial fountain of knowledge about the area at the time of the civil war. Sherry Johnston continued to help after the book was published. She hosted my Conecuh release book signing in the Evergreen Library.

I am deeply indebted to all of these people as well as to my regular readers.

(Another interesting coincidence: I had started the book and already named Caleb's fictional best friend Arlis Johnston *before* I was introduced to Sherry Johnston at the Evergreen library.)

Conecuh

340 Pages

Formats:

eBook \$2.99

Paperback \$16.95

Available for free to Kindle Unlimited subscribers

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B07R6B2H4C>

Average Ratings:

16 Amazon ratings – **** 3.9 out of 5 stars

[Author's note: The overall rating has dropped significantly due to a 1-star review and a 2-star rating. 1-star: a reader took exception to the rape scene and did not finish the book. 2-star: rating only, no user name, and no reason given. 11 of the 12 reviews on Amazon are 5-star. (The other 4 are ratings only.) While Conecuh has won an international award, and word-of-mouth sales continue to be good, most people do not provide reviews or ratings, so the two low ratings bring the overall down significantly, particularly since Amazon does not average the reviews. They have a complicated algorithm that weighs some things more heavily than others. For instance, a recent review counts much more than reviews from when the book was released.]

17 Goodreads ratings – **** 4.2 out of 5 stars

[There is a 2-star rating on Goodreads as well. It's likely the same person who rated the book 2 stars on Amazon since both ratings were entered in the same time frame. You can't please everybody! 😊]

***NOTE: CONECUH eBOOK IS ON SALE FOR 99 CENTS DECEMBER 3rd to DECEMBER 10th! ***

Thank you for reading my newsletter,

[Herb Hughes](#)

While my novels are receiving many great reviews and good comments, as well as international awards, I need your help to spread the word. PLEASE PASS THIS NEWSLETTER ALONG TO FRIENDS AND FAMILY. Please ask them to do the same. Also, please consider leaving a review on Amazon and/or Goodreads. Thank you.

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