

THE RED-EYED RAVEN GAZETTE

The Official Newsletter of the Author Tim Ritter



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WELCOME!



Welcome to the November issue of the Red-Eyed Raven Gazette!

Happy New Year Everyone! Ok, we're thirteen days into it. I hope it looks good to you so far.

Years ago, at one minute past midnight, I used to call my dad and ask him, "How does it look so far?" (meaning the new year)

He'd chuckle and say, "Well it looks good so far!"

Then we'd hang up.

A new year, and a new chance to do something special. Wishing you health and happiness in 2024.

As always, thanks for your encouraging messages sent when these newsletters are released. Your support is very much appreciated.



Author Tim Ritter

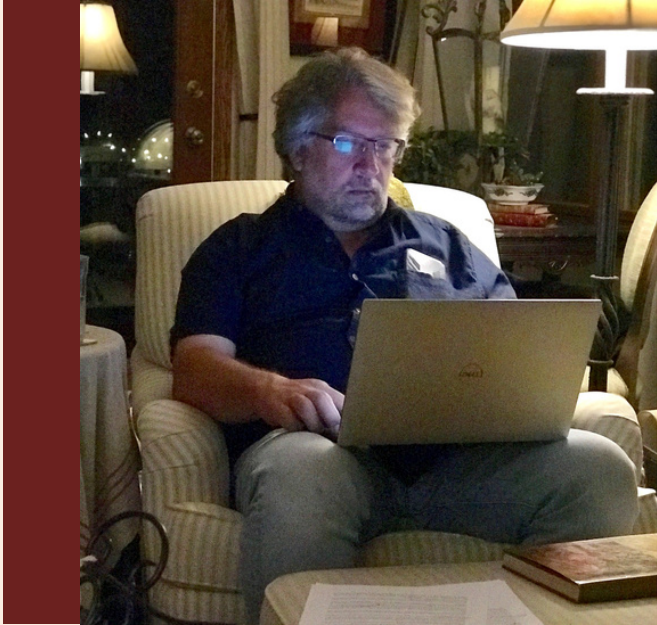


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LET'S TALK WRITING PROJECTS

I once saw a meme that said “Writing: Somewhere between Torture and Fun.” While that’s entirely silly, it’s also partially true. Sometimes the words flow, and it all becomes gloriously clear in your head... and then there are other times...

I bring all this up because I’ve had to make the decision that I’m going to put the Chadwick Line book on the back burner for a while. It’s not coming to me like it should. You’d think that writing about a train that ended nearly 100 years ago would be an easy thing. But honestly it’s turned out to be a bit of a challenge to someone who wants to make sure he gets it right and leaves no stone unturned. The stories and information come together right now in a jumbled fashion, and I don’t like how it feels.

Several years ago I agonized over ***Sarah Burning*** too. I made an impressive timeline, showing how the lives of Sarah, Neil, and Virginia twisted and turned and intertwined. It was something to see! I made character sketches to track how they recovered from the fire, their motivation, etc. It all looked great but did nothing to help me figure out how I was going to actually write the book. Then one day, POOF! Everything fell into place in my head. After that I couldn’t write it down fast enough.

Unfortunately I’m not there yet with ***Chasing the Chadwick Line***. So rather than get irritated about it (yes, it’s been irritating me), I’m setting it aside so that I can make real progress on another book. ***Sarah and Orville*** has been waiting in the wings, partially completed, and I know I can get it done with all the material I have. Sure, there’s a little more research I want to do. But otherwise, I can make wonderful progress on it. As a matter of fact, I believe I can have it complete and go to print by June this year.

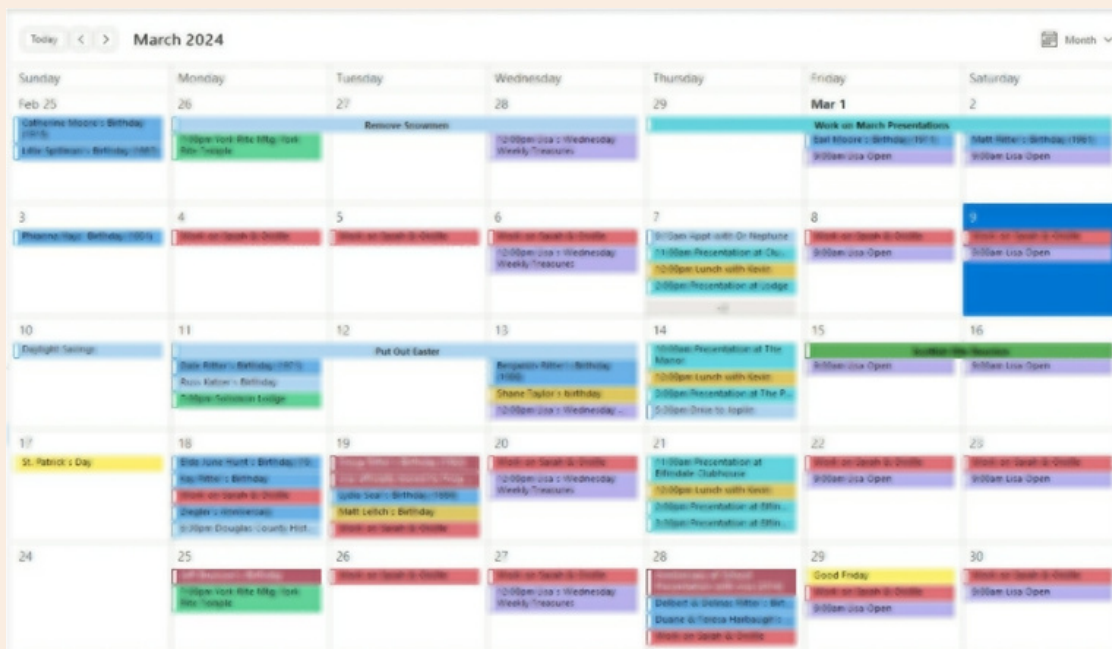
I’m also toying with some marketing ideas when ***Sarah and Orville*** is published, like maybe offering a box set of ***Sarah Burning*** and ***Sarah and Orville*** for folks who didn’t get the first book yet. One of my writer friends has a few box sets that he’s done in the past, so I need to learn a bit more about it. I’ve also got a couple of other ideas, but need to research more before I talk about them.

Over the last couple of years, I've discovered the need for a balance between when I work on new presentations and when I work on writing my books. The presentations have become nearly a fulltime gig. I figured things up a couple of weeks ago, and the numbers are interesting. I write, on average, two new presentations each month. That's twenty-four new presentations each year. And as far as the act of presenting goes, the numbers are much bigger. I actually present a minimum of eight times each month. That's 96 actual presentations each year. Add in the other gigs, like the Republic Library twice each year, a handful of presentations to clubs like Rotary and others, and I present over 100 times each year.

Then of course there are the other projects. I've taken over as director of a degree in one of the masonic organizations to which I belong. These degrees are like morality plays, so I guess you can say I'm directing a short play. The script needs revising, so that's on my plate. Additionally I'm speaking at the Between the Pages Writing Conference in Springfield in June, so I have to put together that presentation as well. I know in general what I want to say; I just have to figure out how to say it.

So with all that going on, I've figured out I have to make the effort to set specific days aside to be sure I have new presentations ready to go each month. And if perhaps we schedule a trip somewhere at the end of a month, I have to make sure I have completed my talks for the following month before we leave. Once the proper time is reserved for writing new talks, I can schedule time to work on new books and other writing projects. It's all plotted, every month, on my calendar, along with birthdays, lunch plans, etc. And yes, it's all color-coded...

They say that creatives must make sure to spend time on their muses. For me, I have to schedule it. Do you find you have to schedule your creative time as well?



In a past issue, I offered up a snippet of a story for you to digest, so I thought why not start the new year with another one. This time you get to read the entire story. This tale has not yet been published, but I have my eye on the chance to add it to a collection in the future. So as usual, it's copyrighted. Keep it to yourself as a New Year's present.

Pick a Different Song Next Time

During the late 1950s, while many radio stations across the nation competed for the strongest signal and biggest audience for live country music radio shows, Springfield, Missouri outshined all of them. From the little town of 80,000 people emerged "Jubilee USA", the only nationally televised country music program with an audience of more than nine million viewers, making Springfield a bit of a mecca for singers and fans alike. Every Saturday night, hundreds of people packed the Jewel Theater to not only enjoy the musical and comedy entertainment, but to also be a part of a live television show.

When the show was cancelled in September of 1960, local radio stations scrambled for an alternative, hoping to maintain Springfield's position as a major stop on nationally touring musicians' schedules. Loyd Evans, from KGBX radio, already hosted a music show called "Country Caravan", which travelled to different areas of the Ozarks. At each location, usually in some prominent spot like the town square, the performers sang and told jokes from atop a long flatbed trailer. Evans brought with him a variety of singers, anchored by a quartet of musicians known as the Ozark Playboys.

When the Jubilee ended, Evans developed a new show for the national touring circuit, and picked a most unusual location from which to record the show: a cave. A short drive north of Springfield, Fantastic Caverns already reigned as a popular attraction, in part because of its size, driving visitors through the cave in jeep-drawn trams. A large flat area in the cavern, the size of an auditorium, boasted seating capacity in the hundreds. Evans named the show "Farmarama", to appeal to the radio-listening agricultural community across the nation. The perfect venue to attract the top singers of the time, the show's popularity grew rapidly and word of its unique setting spread through the music business. Recorded on Saturday nights then played over the radio on Sunday, the show was a hit. Evans stocked the program with a variety of regular musicians and singers, including his anchor group the Ozark Playboys, as well as two comedians to expand the variety of the show. A brilliant and quick-witted young guitar player, Gary Presley, who was the son of Ozark Playboy leader Lloyd Presley, developed a hillbilly character by the name of Herkimer. Another local singer, Jim McCurdy, created a caveman character whose primary goal in life was to disrupt the show and irritate Herkimer. Among the singers and musicians rounding out the cast was a young couple, my parents Delmas and Mary Ritter.

A legendary event in the saga of the Farmarama music show occurred one Saturday evening in late 1964 when Mom was very pregnant with me. By this time she and Dad, barely 25 years old at the time, appeared every weekend on the show. A handful of witnesses to that evening's fun still survive, and they can't help but laugh when they recall how it unfolded.

When Mom and Dad's turn to sing came around, Loyd Evans introduced them.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen, it's time to bring up the Home Folks, Delmas and Mary Ritter! Let's give them a big hand!"

Greeted with loud applause, Dad stepped up to the microphone wearing his flat-top haircut, white shirt with red western string tie, dark pants and black shoes. Mom took her spot next to him, wearing a pretty red maternity dress and matching flat shoes.

“Thank you all,” Dad started, squinting in the lights and holding a hand up over his eyes as he looked out into the audience. “My, it’s great to see everyone out there. And we’re happy to have all the radio listeners as well. Mary, what are we going to sing tonight?”

He turned to Mom as she said quietly, “Love is No Excuse”.

“Love is No Excuse. Alright, boys, let ‘er go,” Dad turned to the band and the song began.

“Love is No Excuse,” written by Justin Tubb, was originally released as a duet by his father Ernest Tubb with Loretta Lynn. Then in February of 1964, Jim Reeves recorded the song with Dottie West, and it was still receiving airplay on the fateful night of this particular performance at the cave.

The opening lyrics to the song, “Love is no excuse for what we are doing”, immediately drew a snicker from a couple of audience members. A few lines later, several people began to chuckle, as Mom and Dad looked at each other, wondering why people thought this love song deserved such laughter. By the time they got to the end of the second verse and sang “Our love can never see the light of day”, most of the audience was laughing and Mom and Dad, as well as the band, began to catch on that perhaps this wasn’t the best song to pick, considering Mom’s maternal situation at the time.

The next lines of the song, “It’s been going on for much too long now and our wrongs have mounted one by one,” pushed the audience over the edge as the spacious room erupted in howling laughter. With still another verse to go, Mom and Dad tried to get out a couple of words, but laughing so hard, there was no way anyone could continue with the song. Mom turned as red as her dress and tears rolled down her face, smearing her makeup. Dad stopped singing when Mom did, having turned red too. Everyone else on stage, practically doubled over with laughter, stopped playing when Mom and Dad quit singing. Nobody on stage could hit a note.

Eventually Dad was able to gain control enough to step up to the microphone.

“I think we’ll pick a different song next week! Thank you all!”

The crowd rose to its feet in thunderous applause and whistles as Mom and Dad, still laughing, left the stage.

The original recording of that show has been lost to the ravages of time, but legend has it that Loyd Evans stepped up to the microphone in an attempt to regain control of the show. Herkimer stepped up with him. Speechless, they just stood there for a moment and looked at each other, shaking their heads and laughing.

Finally Gary leaned in and said, “Do you suppose someone ought to tell them?”

It took a moment for Lloyd to respond.

“Tell them what?”

Herkimer paused for a moment with razor-sharp timing.

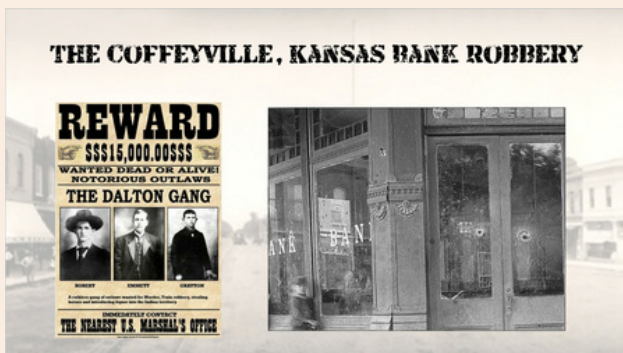
“That we all know what they’ve done...”

Howling laughter erupted once again, and it took several minutes for the show to move on to the next song.

For the rest of her life, my mother occasionally encountered someone who remembered that night... and she still turned beet red.

PRESENTATION UPDATE

If you or anyone you know or belong to a group needing speakers, please give them my contact info!



Every month in this section I highlight one of my current presentations. I'm really excited about this newest one:

The Coffeyville Bank Robbery

When the Dalton Gang planned what would become their final raid on October 5, 1892, they were sure that the simultaneous robbery of two banks in broad daylight would put them in the history books. And they were right, it did, but for all the wrong reasons.

The hair-brained scheme, inspired by the James-Younger Gang's robbery in Northfield, Minnesota (that was a failure, right?), resulted in the total destruction of the gang as the town banded together to stop them in their tracks, at the unfortunate cost of the lives of four brave citizens.

This lively talk includes animated maps showing not only the movements of the gang, but also notes the progression of the local citizens learning of the robberies and how they took steps to stop the Daltons.

SCHEDULE OF APPEARANCES

January 17, 2024 - 12:00p.m.
Marshfield Rotary Club
Lions Club Building
Marshfield, MO
Presentation: *Tornado Outbreak of April 1880*

February 20, 2024 - 7:00p.m.
Monroe Coffee Co.
Fair Grove, MO
Presentation: *The Northfield Bank Robbery*

April 20, 2024 - 10:30a.m.
Republic Library
Republic, MO
Presentation: *Wild Bill Hickok and Davis Tutt: A Big Bucket of Ugly*

June 8, 2024 - Time TBD
Between the Pages Writers Conference
Springfield, MO
Presentation on Poetry and Short Prose. Title TBD.

September, 2024 - 9:00a.m.
Discover The Ozarks Festival
Ava, MO
Ava History Tour - Host

My regular speaking engagements, twice each month, continue at the three Elfindale senior living facilities in Springfield. Also, I am now presenting monthly at The Preston Senior Living Facility, as well as Elfindale Manor.