

**Your On the  
Street Reporter**



**Uyless Black**

**Book Signings**

## **Books Signings**

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## Your on the Street Reporter<sup>1</sup> Book Signings

**November 10 – 17, 2012**

### **Report One: Sunday, November 11: Why I Dislike Book Signings**

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. Remember movies about the writer who makes it big? He sits at a table inside a huge bookstore, signing his name to his now famous book while a queue of admiring readers snakes around the building. This file of fans sometimes circles around the block, as each person anticipates meeting THE WRITER.

I've been the person sitting at that table. While writing technical books, my publishers sometimes set up signings for which I traveled to book stores to pen my name to my books. I sometimes added a personal greeting at the request of the person purchasing the book; a person I had never met.

- "Hello. Thanks for stopping by."
- "I've just read your book about "harmonic distortion in an email attachment." How thrilling!"
- "Thanks. What's your name? I'll put it right here next to mine," as I opened the book.
- "It's Maybelline, but you can call me Mabel. That's what my friends call me. Can you sign my name, too...as Mabel?"
- I don't bother to offer that Mabel is not my friend, but she is kind enough to come to this signing, buy my book, and bolster my ego. I say, "Sure!"
- Mabel adds, "Would you mind making it as I've written down here?" As she hands me a scribbled note.
- The note reads, *Mabel. Keep up the good work! Fondly, Uyless.*
- These kinds of requests were infrequent, but they did happen. This incident took place at a book signing in New York City. I did as told, not knowing if her "keeping up" her good work might have been successfully acting at the local Broadway shows or successfully axing successive husbands.

And the truth is I was thankful when people attended a signing, even a modern Lizzie Borden. I am still doing book signings, and for my recent books, I am even more thankful. The reason is simple enough. I have not been the person sitting at that table with a block-long file of fans awaiting my autograph. In past, I had reasonable success with these events. But for the present, the words line and queue do not fit my experience with book signings.

I now dislike book signings. I dislike book signings because I fear no one will show up. I don't mind the loss of sales. I mind this situation: The bookstore employees have set-up an area for the book signing. Depending on the season, this vacant area may be large. For example, during the Christmas holidays the store often creates a large vacant area to accommodate the incoming traffic of readers. For the winter holidays, a book is a popular gift-giving item and some people

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to: <http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=pen+and+quill&qs=n&form=QBIR&pq=pen+and+quill&sc=8-13&sp=-1&sk> for the pen and quill image.

think an autographed book from the author makes the book more valuable. (As an aside, it does if the name of the author is say, Robert Frost. It does not if the author is, say, Uyless Black.)

The problem for me with my recent, non-technical books was that this area remained vacant for the entire book signing show. Two hours of staring at a vacant space, supposedly to be occupied with admirers, can do a lot to bring one's literary talents into question. The store employees could be seen milling about through the book stacks, occasionally casting an empathetic, kindhearted glance in my direction. I could read their minds: *Poor man. He looks so lonely out there. Why is he always looking at the clock?* Even for a relatively embarrassing-proof person, it was embarrassing.

My technical books were holiday-agnostic. Their sales never varied from one month or season to the other. Hm. In hindsight, their sales *did* drop off during December. Who wants to read fifty rules of protocols when *Fifty Shades of Grey* is for sale? Even more, which gift would you prefer to have at your bedside on Christmas night?

In the early 2000s, I had a book signing at a Border's store in Tyson's Corner, Virginia. The main purpose was to promote my *Voice over IP* book, published by Prentice Hall. The turn-out was not great, but I had an audience who listened to my short talk about the revolutionary technology. As you can see, I survived. On the other hand, look what happened to Borders: down the tubes into Chapter 11. One can't continue to gamble with happenstance book signings and hope to make it in this competitive world. Barnes & Noble, beware.

Anyway, during one of my book signings that highlighted a less popular technology, I recall about five people showed up for this event. Four, if I exclude myself. Three, if I exclude the Prentice Hall representative. But the show must go on. Even for three people. Truth be told, I loved those three loyalists. If hugging had been permitted, and I am not a hugger, I would have latched on to each one.

They told me they were there to meet Uyless Black, not to buy my book. I was complimented of course, and proceeded to give them a free copy of a book they had already bought. But compliments do not buy airline tickets needed for travel to book signings at which there are no signings and no book sales. In those old days, my publisher took care of this overhead. But not now.

So, there it is, laid out bare. I dislike book signings because I rarely sign books. Let's hope for better times this week. Come on out. I offer free drinks and free book marks. I'll give away my books just to have you fill that vacant area in front of my signing desk.

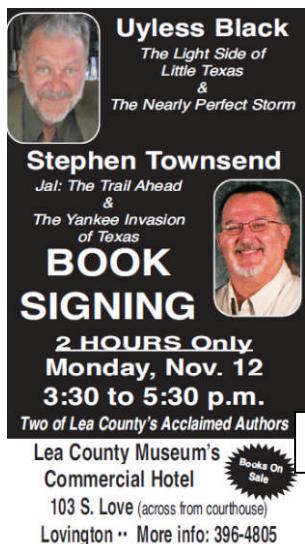
Your on the Street Reporter

## Your on the Street Reporter Book Signings

**November 11 – 17, 2012**

### **Report Two: Monday, November 12: First Book Signing**

Today is the first book signing of my book signing tour. It's scheduled to take place this afternoon at the Lea County Museum in Lovington, New Mexico, my hometown. Speaking of New Mexico, this vast tour will encompass the state of New Mexico, from the south (Lovington), to the north (Albuquerque). What the tour lacks in number of locations (two) is offset by the number of miles between the locations (three hundred).



Jim Harris, the director of the museum, has set up this specific event to be held with another local writer, Stephen Townsend, as seen in the poster to the left (Figure 1).

Last week I bragged to some of my tennis mates that I was headed for New Mexico to promote my award-winning book, *The Light Side of Little Texas*, which is actually about New Mexico. One of these men, one of dry (very dry) wit, responded.

“Congratulations, Uyless. Say, how many books are written about New Mexico each year?” In my defense, more than one.

**Figure 1. Local stars.**

My “full” tour was set up by Sylvia Gann (SG) Mahoney, my book agent/publicist. (Given what she had to work with, she did a grand job.) I'll leave this report for now. I'm meeting with Lovington's City Clerk. She is going to show me the available plots at the local cemetery. (with offerings of tailored signings and inscriptions.) The Black Family plot is nearly full, so I must seek other places for my big sleep. I hope to delay the use of this turf for as long as possible. But I'm no longer a spring rooster and the final Book Signing in the Sky is not so far into the future.

Thus, I've come to like this saying:  
“Oh, to be old again!” Spoken by a young corpse.

More later.

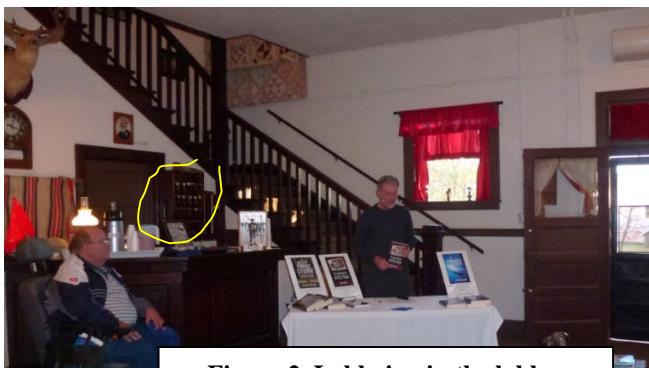
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The dust has cleared for book signing number one. Tally: I sold seven books and gave away fifteen, an example of a disproportionate ratio. But what could I do? I had relatives in the queue, some old classmates, the son of the woman who first hired me as a life guard in 1954, as well as the best man at one of my brother's wedding.

I know, I know. In order to enact *The Death of a Salesman*, one has to first enact The Birth of a Salesman. That's where I am lacking. But let me pose these situations and ask if you would demand payment? One person in the queue was a long-lost cousin who had come all the way from south Texas to line up at my table. Another was one of my brothers, who, if the weather is dry in New Mexico, can barely walk (which means he can rarely walk). Yet another person was the director of the museum in which the signing took place.

If there had been some strangers and foreign blood in the queue, I could have made some money. But then, if there had been no relatives and friends in the queue, there would have been no queue to begin with. Better a queue, however non-compensating, than no queue at all.

And the (serious) truth is: I enjoyed this signing.

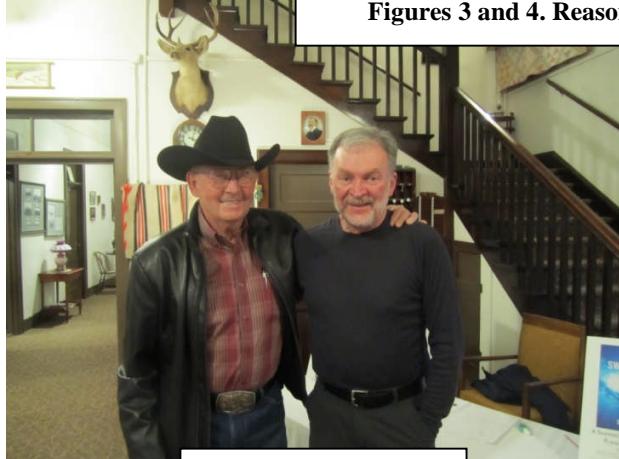


**Figure 2. Lobbying in the lobby.**

This book signing was located in the lobby of an old hotel that now houses the Lea County Museum. Figure 2 shows my table, located in front of the reception desk. Notice the key box next to the stairs (yellow circle). In past times, that is where a lodger left the keys to his/her room. The stairs are to the second floor, in which the former lodging rooms are now museum exhibits.

In a later report, I will walk you through this extraordinary museum. For now, I can be seen speaking to a small group of people about my latest three books. Two are light memoirs of my youth. For the third book: The room's ambience seemed to change in keeping with my explaining the themes of *The Nearly Perfect Storm: An American Financial and Social Failure*. I was asked if there were solutions to our nation's present political ills? I said, "Yes, the solutions are actually simple." But I said the present political/social atmosphere in this country made it impossible to implement the solutions.

Part of the joy of this signing was to see old acquaintances, to renew old friendships. One visit was with Bill Lee, a friend of my older brothers, who always treated this runt (a boy at the time) kindly. Bill and I can be seen in Figure 3. In Figure 4, I show two more of my book signing groupies. Granted, I use the word *groupies* loosely. I'm trying to impress the newcomers to these reports who might be skeptical of my coolness. Truth in disclosure: the woman on the left is my cousin, Peg. The woman on the right is my sister-in-law Cherrill. Their respective husbands queued up in front of my signing table and...yep, got free copies of my books. But their free ride was at my insistence, not theirs. I was glad to have them in my company, not to mention in my book signing queue.

**Figures 3 and 4. Reasons for a full queue:****Figure 3. Friends.****Figure 4. Relatives.**

By the way, take a look at the old stove in Figure 4. Take a look at the old chairs. The ambience of an old hotel, with each lodging room displaying artifacts of this fine part of America, sets the stage for a place that is well done, understated, and elegant. It should be on your list of places to visit.

I survived, even enjoyed this book signing. The one coming up in Albuquerque is another matter. I'll have no relatives or friends in the queue. Consequently, I may have no queue.

Your on the Street Reporter

## Your on the Street Reporter Book Signings

**November 11 – 17, 2012**

### **Report Three: Tuesday, November 13: Future Writers?**

Today was devoted to licking my book signing wounds. A big part of the first-aid was speaking to a class of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students. At the invitation of my niece, Shannon Black, I was invited to the Will Rogers Elementary School in Hobbs, New Mexico, to speak to her class (combined with two other classes) about being a writer. See Figure 1.

Speaking to 3<sup>rd</sup> graders about writing? I wondered what I might add to “See Spot run.” Anyway, I accepted. It was the highlight of this book signing tour, and I discovered I had underestimated my audience.



**Figure 1. Will Rogers school.**



**Figure 2. Writing 101.**

I spent about 30 minutes talking with 60-70 kids who were eight or nine years of age, as seen in Figure 2. What was I going to say? I do not know one single rule about writing. The only truism I understand is this: One cannot become a writer if one does not write. Like anything in life, it requires practice.

But how was I going to interest these children? How was I going to motivate them? I decided to start-off with an admission. After introducing myself, I launched into a world of an eight-year old mind.

Besides, when in doubt, lay the cards on the table: I told them that when I was eight years old, I hated writing, that I was afraid of placing words on a page. I think I got their attention. *What's this dude who's afraid of writing doing up there talking to me about writing?* I told them I overcame my fear by coming to understand that writing is nothing more than talking on paper.

I asked the class, “Do you like to talk?”  
A resounding yes!

“Then try this: When you talk, put your talk on paper. Just write your talk down on your tablet.” Some vacant stares. “OK, let’s do some writing! You and me. One writer to another!” Smiles.

"Let's begin with...say, 'I went for a walk.' There! We have the beginning of a written story. But we need more to make it interesting. So, let's use our imagination. Why did you go for a walk?"

"Raise your hand! Why go for a walk?"

Scores of hands (brown hands, as this part of Hobbs is mostly Latino) shot up. "OK, why?" as I pointed to a boy in the first row. He answered, "To be alone."

A 3<sup>rd</sup> grade existentialist. But he responded and deserved recognition. "Yes. And look what has happened. We are only two sentences into our writing, and we already have the beginning of a story."

"What's next? Let's ask: 'Why does a person want to be alone while walking?' " The next answer came: "To look at things." And once again, more tiny hands sprung up to offer their view on the construction of the plot for our book. I asked, "What kind of things?" And off we went into a writers' workshop, if only for a short time.

I wanted to break the barrier (I think a common misunderstanding) that writing is somehow a magical, mystical transcendence from ordinary communication. Certainly, fine writing is composed differently from daily, ordinary discourse (but not by the margin too many give to the idea). Too much formality leads to stilted writing; too little leads to texts of trash.

I wanted to have them come to believe: *If I can talk, if I can think, I can write*, and at the same time not have the process be laborious.



The children seemed to get into the spirit of things. I certainly did. I don't recall what I was emphasizing when Shannon took the photo in Figure 3, but I was determined to keep their attention, even if I went through a few loops (with my hands in this instance).

Thirty minutes went by as if I were suspended in a fanciful three-minute bubble. As I was talking, a subconscious thought kept bubbling-up, *This is a lot more fun than not signing books at a book signing.*

I did not have time to field all the questions. One that I tried to respond to came from another tiny child (I have concluded from a survey this group that all eight-year-old humans are tiny). She asked, "Do you write children's books?" Another asked, "Do you write color books?"

Shannon tried to come to the rescue by whipping out my *Teach Yourself Networking in 24 Hours* book. I rescued Shannon by putting my blog address on the white board and directing them to a color book with pictures of creatures. I first asked the three teachers in the room if I could direct

these kids to the big bad Net. Permission granted, so I proceeded to do a bit of marketing. (After all, young readers become old readers.)

Upon closing, I made reference to my gray beard and white skin. I told them of how some people called us older people gray panthers. They liked this term. Some spontaneously offered how big and powerful panthers were. I decided to try something that the teachers may not have liked, but they did not comment on it later.

"I see out there (as I pointed to my audience) mostly brown skins. Some white skins like mine (as I pointed to my face.). Let's make up a term for us, for us writers, you and me. Let's call ourselves the Brown Panthers! My skin is white. Some of yours is, too. But for our work, we are (as I thumped my chest) the Brown Panthers! And we are proud of it!"

Most of the kids shouted and jumped on the Brown Panther bandwagon. We entered into an agreement. If they promised to write their thoughts to me, I promised to write back, to each and every one of those tots, to those wonderful, whimsical little brown panthers.

I could be busy, but it will surely beat watching ESPN reruns. I am sure some of these children will respond. So will I. And I hope we will communicate with the written word to teach one another how to write. We all can learn, and children are often our best teachers.

Your on the Street Reporter

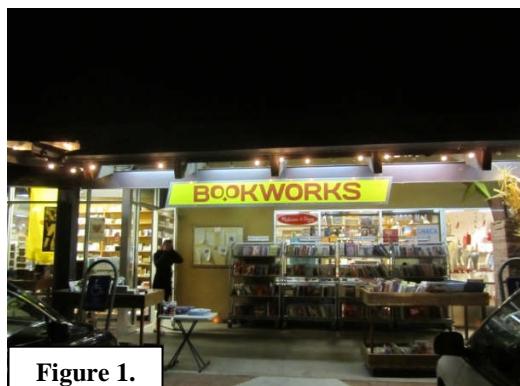
## Your on the Street Reporter Book Signings

**November 11 – 17, 2012**

### **Report Four. Thursday, November 15: Putting Me Out of My Misery**

This evening I finished the book signings that my book agent, my literary masochist, set up for this week. SG Mahoney arranged this second signing at Bookworks, located in the north valley of Albuquerque. If you live in this area, or if you are visiting, stop by this book seller shop. It's located in an attractive (old) part of the city at 4022 Rio Grande Blvd.

Figure 1 shows the front of the store. Figure 2 shows the owners (Wyatt Wegrzyn and Danielle Foster) preparing for the upcoming onslaught from my book fans, soon to flood the store to seek my autograph and hear me read passages from my books.



**Figure 1.**



**Figure 2.**

Disclosure: I am not being paid for this promotion. It is unlikely I will do another book signing here. I want to take this opportunity to ask my readers to support book stores that actually have a street address, and not just a Web name. With the move to online book shopping and the use of e-books, places such as Bookworks are swimming upstream. Just look at the once fine bookstore chain of Borders.

I miss the Borders store up where I live in North Idaho. I went there often. I bought books along with coffee. I sat in the lounge, sipping my java, while thumbing through my recent purchases. It was a pleasant, peaceful way to spend time. But this sort of interlude no longer exists in Hayden, Idaho. The building that Borders once occupied has been rented by a cosmetics chain.

The adjacent community (Coeur d'Alene) does have a local book seller that is similar to Bookworks. It is not as convenient to my home as was Borders. No matter, I'm developing a new habit. If we do not support these local shops, we will end up having less diversity in our lives.

What will we witness, say, ten years from now? I suspect the urban landscape will be littered with empty buildings, the former occupants victims of the eBay's of the world. But how about Pizza Hut and Taco Bells? Aren't they impervious to the Internet's intrusions? How often do you order home delivery pizzas? Why not tacos as well? Why not just about everything we buy? I've

heard that Amazon.com is considering using drones to deliver purchases directly to the purchaser's home!

I contributed to the demise of the local Borders store. During the two or three years before the chain went bust, I often had to wait several days (even weeks) for the store to fill an order. I began to log on to Amazon.com. With few exceptions, I had a book in my hands in about one week. I don't know how book sellers---large or small---can compete with Amazon, Barnes & Noble, eBay, and other online giants.



**Figure 3.**

from one replete with errors to one that actually resembled a book. I had forgotten Dawn lives in the area. She was gracious to consent to posing for a photo, and shown in Figure 3.



**Figure 4.**

Tom, "Sure. ..Hm, where's Kaky? Must be looking around."  
"Go find her! Lu has to introduce me to *somebody*."

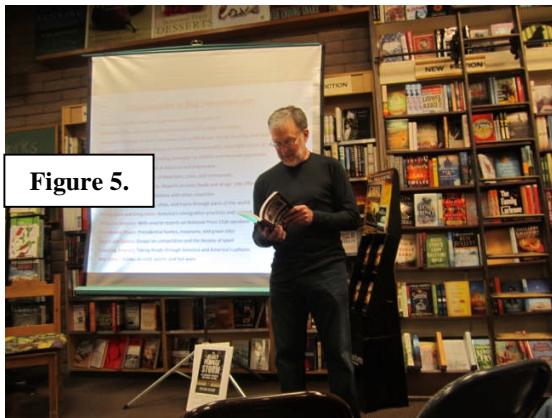
Tom found Kaky. They sat down. Lu introduced me to them, a person they already knew. But I was grateful Lu was not talking to a set of empty chairs. I was surprised and disappointed by the turn out. As mentioned, almost no one showed. I had received "intentions to attend" from several of my University of New Mexico fraternity brothers. Some of my most loyal "Your on the Street Reporter" readers live in this part of the state. I understood enough about these kinds of book

While I arranged my signing table and refreshments, a person behind my back mentioned my name. I turned around and saw a woman holding the *Storm* book. She asked if I would sign it. Sure. She asked me to inscribe the name "Dawn Hall." Hm. The name sounded familiar. I hesitated. She revealed, "I worked on your book." Of course! No wonder the name sounded familiar.

I was surprised and pleased. Dawn Hall was one of two grammatical editors for the book. Her first-rate work led to the transposition of the manuscript

As 7 PM approached, Lu (one of the store's staff and seen in Figure 4) approached me, "Would you like to get started? I'll introduce you." As I surveyed the set of empty seats, I asked, "Who are you going to introduce me to? I already know myself."

She was diplomatic and did not respond. I then asked my brother Tom (who had recently arrived), "Tom would you and Kaky (my sister-in-law) please take a seat?! Maybe you sitting down will entice others in the store to sit down."

**Figure 5.**

signings to know there would not be a queue of readers waiting outside the store. But even with my low expectations, I had expected a larger attendance.

See those chairs in Figure 5? Only five of them were occupied: Tom, Kaky, my fraternity brother Ray Sanchez, one of my supporters from Santa Fe (Carleen Lazzell an editor of a fine journal, *La Cronica de Nuevo Mexico*), and a stranger. What was he doing here? I wondered if I had known him somewhere along life's highways. It

would have been impolite of me to not have acknowledged him. So,

“Say, you look familiar. Do we know each other?”

“No.”

“Thanks for coming in.”

“I enjoyed your talk.”

“Thank you.”

He left without buying a book. Maybe I should be charging for admission. Book-signing-wise, this week has been unsuccessful. But it is exactly what I expected. After all, my name is not John Grisham, Danielle Steele, James Patterson, or other notables on the best seller lists.

I made a fair amount of money writing books about computer networks. And joking aside, I had successful book signings, both in America and Europe. But for my present writings, I am an unknown. I don't expect people to leave their homes to drive to a book store to listen to a stranger. It takes time. John Grisham started off his career by printing and publishing his own works. He threw away a lot of his books, several hundred of this first effort. He lost a lot of money. I can relate. My Schedule C is bleeding red.

Nonetheless, in the long run, this week was a hiccup; a glitch for sure, but a speed bump. In the long run, it will work out. Besides, I had two very fine experiences this week: The talk with the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade future writers, the beginning of a workshop. And my brother Tom's induction to the Lea County Athletes' Hall of Fame, the subject of an upcoming report.

There will be one more report in this series. Tonight, Reporterette (Holly), Tom, Kaky, and I will attend the 2012 New Mexico and Arizona Book Awards ceremony. *The Light Side of Little Texas* is one of five finalists for the “non-fiction, other” best book of 2012 award.

As I learned this week, *Light Side* does not draw a crowd at a book signing event. But so far, the Historical Society of New Mexico awarded it the best book of 2012 for the depiction of domestic life in New Mexico. As mentioned, it's a finalist for another award to be announced tonight.

I'm on the right course. More than that, I'm having a fine time at this stage of my life. While I am at it, I thank you, my readers, for your support of my efforts to move to a different kind of writing.

Your on the Street Reporter

## **Your on the Street Reporter Books Signings**

**November 11 – 17, 2012**

### **Report Five. Thursday, November 17: What is Good Writing Anyway?**

Hello from Your On the Street Reporter. This is the last report in this series about book signings and book awards.

#### **Awards Ceremonies**

During the past eight months I have attended four awards ceremonies. I received an award at one event. I am a finalist at another event. I attended the two other events to cheer on friends and relatives who were in contention for an award. From these four experiences, I have come to five conclusions.

In order to break even or turn a profit, the producers of these events must have a large audience in attendance (to buy dinner and drinks at a cash bar in order for the producers to pay for the award trophies and the assembly room rental).

**1) Therefore:**

Multiple awards are given in order to increase the number of candidates who attend in order to increase the number of friends & relatives of the candidates who attend in order to increase the number of friends & relatives of the friends & relatives of the candidates who attend.

**2) In addition, local politicians are invited, knowing they will be asked to stand and take a bow for running the city into insolvency. This tactic has the added benefit of the politicians bringing along their friends and relatives so the politicians can demonstrate to their loved ones that at least one part of their constituency consists of non-hostile voters.**

**3) The really clever producers invite people who received awards in the past who will also stand and take a bow. This plan has the added benefit of these past stars bringing along their friends and relatives so they can flaunt their fifteen minutes of fame for another few seconds and further alienate their jealous in-laws and second cousins.**

**4) Which results in everyone in the room standing up at one time or another during the evening and taking at least one bow. This recognition increases the group's jocularity and promotes business at the producer's cash bar.**

A win-win situation for all...with the exception of the losers. But:

**5) These souls and their saddened set of friends and relatives will head for the cash bar to drown their troubles, sodden their brains, and bad-mouth the winners.**

Last night's ceremonies had fifty-two categories for which awards were given. Fifty-two, and that number did not include eight special awards. The master of ceremonies (Paul Rhetts and the producer of the event) asked those in the audience who were candidates for awards to stand. About 30% of the people in the room stood.

Paul asked those to stand who were attending because of their intellectual interest in hearing the names of fifty-two people announced over a PA system, or of anyone who just happened to drop by. No one stood. Everyone else in the room was a friend or relative of the candidates. Just a joke. Paul did not solicit strangers to stand, as he knew there were no strangers in the audience.

My book *The Light Side of Little Texas* was entered into the category called, "Non-fiction, other." Paul told the audience this category was one of the top five of the most competitive categories. Uh oh, my book had a lot of competition. I would have preferred to have been in the category of "Gardening" as it had one entry. This book entry, co-authored by Dave DeWitt and Louis Manno was named *Dave DeWitt's Chile Trivia*. It won the highly contested "Gardening" award.

My non-native New Mexican readers might be wondering why only one book was entered in the "Gardening" category? The answer is that there are not all that many gardens in New Mexico to begin with. Severe droughts that have recently occurred in an already semi-desert-type biosphere have put a damper (so to speak) on growing green things. In New Mexico, the magazine *House and Gardens* is sold as *House*.

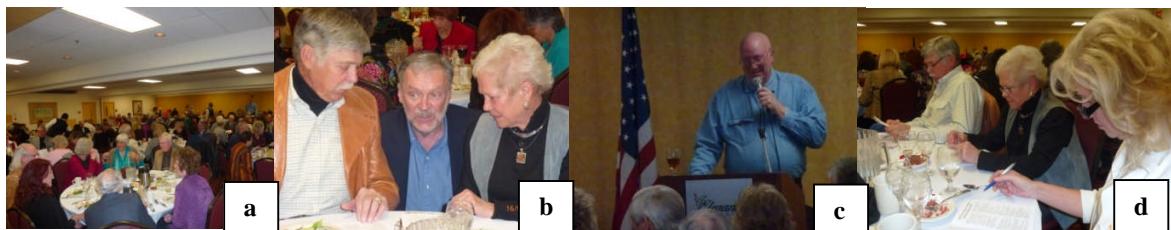
### A Fine Service

Paul runs a fine awards ceremony, and he does much more than MC this event. To give you an idea of his operating credo, he began his program by stating what is (or should be) the focus of this assemblage: "The pursuit of one thing: books." By that, he encourages readers to read and writers to write. He and his colleagues sponsor "Friends of Authors" and "Friends of Books" to promote literacy beyond Twitter posts.

The Southwest Writers group is dedicated to helping aspiring writers learn to write better. As one of Paul's assistants told us, "We make writers write good." ...Just testing your saavy, if perhaps you should enter their program. She said, "We make writers write well."

Paul does not return the books that are submitted for the contest. They are donated to the Albuquerque Public library.

The four photos in Figure 1 were taken during the ceremonies. Figure (a) shows part of the audience. In view of this large gathering, Figure (b) shows me talking to Tom and Kaky about the idea of the three of us starting-up our own book awards ceremony event. Notice my enthusiasm. Notice the polite diffidence of my relatives. Figure (c) Paul announces to everyone in the room the presentation of awards to almost everyone in the room. Figure (d): my reporter team for the evening takes notes and tallies up the winners.



**Figure 1. Scenes from the book awards ceremony.**

I am happy to inform you that *Light Side* scored high enough to be one of the finalists for the award. In order to reach the finals, the judges' scores for a book had to total to an average of 90 points or higher. I like the open aspect of this contest. All contestants were given copies of the judges' worksheets. We could examine how we fared in (a) cover (25% of the score), (b) interior (25% of the score), and (c) content (50% of the score).

I like the disciplined manner by which the judges make their scores. My only thought is that the content should be more than 50% of the overall weighting. Anyone can hire formatters and artists to create the book's layout. That's what I did. The content is what counts. The layouts are secondary. On the other hand, books are indeed often judged by their covers and pretty pictures.

I did not win first place. I was lucky and unlucky. Lucky in that I scraped by with an average score of 90. Unlucky in that one judge did not like much of anything about my book and gave it a 75. That score sunk me. The other scores were in the mid to high 90s and might have placed *Light Side* into contention for at least a tie for the award. The 75-scoring judge even gave the book low marks for its interior and exterior design, a strange rating as both had been lauded.

I had been optimistic about my chances. I was a bit down after the announcement. After going over the judges' scores I felt better. Judges, thanks for making your scores available. I do have one more suggestion: Add a category of "Humor." I think I would have fared better if *Light Side* had been in this category. Mr. Rhetts, if you are reluctant to have to deal with yet more categories, delete "Gardening."

### Tally for the Week

It has been an interesting week for this armchair reporter. The downside was a book signing at Bookworks (otherwise, a store you should frequent); off-set by a fine session at the Lea County Museum; topped off with a talk to 3<sup>rd</sup> graders about how to become a writer; accentuated with being a finalist for an award at the New Mexico/Arizona Book Awards ceremony.

To close this report on a positive note, the labels below represent the honors bestowed on *The Light Side of Little Texas*. The label on the left is for the finalist award discussed in this report. The label on the right is for *Light Side* being awarded the best book for 2012 by the Historical Society of New Mexico for depicting domestic life in New Mexico.



At the beginning of this piece, I mentioned its title was, “What is Good Writing Anyway?” I have been told that in conformance with conventional grammar rules, it should read, “What is Fine Writing Anyway?” The latter sentence is correct, but the first phrase seems to roll-off the tongue better than the second phrase. From this admittedly ill-educated writer, it seems to me the essential aspect of writing is to have the writing roll-off the reader’s tongue that results in an easy-going train of thought. Certainly not *each* sentence, as there must be word-bridges, but compositions that meld and mutually link with one another to form a pleasant, sometimes rhythmical set of words. Of course, these words should come together to form an interesting thought.

Having uttered those pontifications, I don’t look at myself as a writer. I don’t define myself as a writer. I think of myself as a person who writes. I am not castigating the profession of writing. I simply do not think of myself this way. I’ve had...as have all of us...so many more experiences than the “slot” of being a writer, an accountant, a housewife, a stockbroker, a lawyer, or any other convenient handle we and others assign to ourselves.

### **It's a Wrap**

It is likely I have seen the last of this event. I doubt I have any more books about New Mexico in me. (I might do a memoir about my college fraternity times at the University of New Mexico (UNM). My working title is *School Daze*.)

So, I bid farewell to the New Mexico/Arizona Book Awards contest with two more thoughts to Paul Rhetts: Keep up your efforts to persuade people to write and read passages longer than 140 characters in length. And add a humor category.

Your on the Street Reporter