

Presentations



Books are not the only way in which I share my knowledge and enthusiasm: I also conduct writing workshops and give speeches on the subjects I have researched. Below are a few of my topics. If you are interested in a particular topic, please contact me to ask about my schedule and fees.

When Women Played Baseball: The Story of Margaret, Nellie, and Rose

In 1934 two teen girls, one from Illinois and one from Indiana, played hardball on a bloomer girl baseball team: a team that stopped in Wheeling, WV, specifically to pick up a third teen. These three young women — Margaret Gisolo, Nellie Kearns, and Rose Gacioch — came from very different backgrounds and had different reasons for playing baseball. When the season was over they followed different paths. But playing baseball on Maud Nelson's last bloomer girl team profoundly affected their lives and helped determine their careers. **This presentation was chosen by the Illinois Humanities Council as part of its Road Scholar programs for the 2013-2014 season.**

How I Found Maud Nelson Before the Internet Existed

When I was researching *Women at Play: The Story of Women in Baseball* (Harcourt, 1993), back in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it took me four years to track down the identity of the most important woman in the early history of baseball. That was Maud Nelson. However: her name wasn't Maud. And her

name wasn't Nelson. This presentation starts with those ancient research devices, the card catalog and the *Readers Guide to Periodical Literature*, and goes from there to library files on local people, newspaper clippings, telephone calls, microfilm, and so on — all the while focusing on the seemingly elusive, seemingly hidden baseball player known as Maud Nelson.

A Man, A Dog, A Baseball Team — And the Pursuit of the Pennant

This is the true story of Jack Graney, his bull terrier Larry, the Cleveland major league baseball team, and the pursuit of the pennant. Jack Graney was a man of many firsts: leadoff batter, first man to face Red Sox pitcher Babe Ruth, first man to collect a hit off the Bambino, and first (and only) major leaguer to own a dog which was the official team mascot. This is a story of devotion, commitment, and persistence, illustrating what it means to be major league. The talk is accompanied by visuals and by a short reading from my book, *Jack and Larry*.

Mountain Passes in American History

American history is told through the story of six mountain passes which played a critical role in the nation's growth. Each of the six passes has at least two dramatic stories associated with it, revealing the different ways in which humans react to extreme conditions. Audiences come away from this program with a deeper understanding of the land, traveling over it, and the knowledge and help that Native tribes gave to European-American settlers.

Self-Publishing Through Kindle Direct Publishing: The Step-by-Step Process

This Powerpoint-type presentation gives a colorful, easy-to-comprehend program on how to self-publish a physical, hold-in-your-hand book as well as an ebook, at no cost, using Amazon's KDP program. The visuals depict the real-life, step-by-step process of publishing a book through Kindle, from signing on and setting up an account; to making decisions on page layout, type face, and cover design; to submitting and proofreading; and, finally, to publication of the book. Those who attend this presentation leave feeling they have gained essential how-to knowledge for publishing their own book.

Keeping the Wolf from the Door: A Look at Idioms

This presentation examines aspects of folk wisdom as seen through idioms -- idioms about domestic animals, wild animals, work, relationships, and the environment. A few examples based on observation of domestic animals include: "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink" which has been around for 900 years; "Let sleeping dogs lie" for 600; "chicken feed" for only 200.

This hour-long program is given with a colorful Powerpoint-type presentation featuring the idioms.

Earl Derr Biggers: Thinking Like a Mystery Writer

As we approach the 2020s, historians and literary critics are examining the Golden Age of Mystery (1920s). J.K. Van Dover's *Making the Detective Story American* examines the novels of Biggers, Van Dine, and Hammet. Leslie Klinger's *Classic American Crime Fiction of the 1920s* reprints Earl Derr Biggers' first mystery. And my own biography of Biggers, *Charlie Chan's Poppa*, is the first and only book about the man who created detective Charlie Chan. But before he created his Chinese-Hawaiian sleuth, Earl Derr Biggers was a well-known author of popular fiction. He applied much of his knowledge of plot, character, and humor to his first Chan novel, *The House Without a Key*. As he wrote the next five books in the series, Biggers focused more on mystery-writing techniques and less on the romances and escapades that had filled his earlier works. This informative presentation examines the literary devices that mystery writers employ — and how these devices work in the six Chan novels.

Writing Fiction and Nonfiction

For years this was my most popular workshop, a 4-5 hour overview on writing adult fiction and nonfiction. In both the fiction portion and the nonfiction portion I provide pertinent handouts based on real-life query letters, proposals, sample chapters, and work schedules. Throughout the workshop I include information on getting published.