

MARCH 2025 | ISSUE 18

THE RED-EYED RAVEN GAZETTE

The Official Newsletter of Author Tim Ritter



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WELCOME!



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Welcome to the March 2025 issue of the Red-Eyed Raven Gazette!

Many thanks to all of you who have taken the time to subscribe to this newsletter! I enjoy putting it together, and I hope you enjoy reading it. Feel free to email any questions you have to tritterman@gmail.com.

There seems to be no shortage of things to talk about. In this issue, I'm offering up an excerpt of something I wrote several years ago that is on the list of stories to revise. And holy smokes does it need a lot of revision!! I hope you are intrigued by what you read. Also, I'll give you a behind-the-scenes look at the business of doing presentations. Then there's a little commentary with a suggestion of one way you can do something with books you own but do not plan to read again. Lastly, as always The Presentation Update page has all the latest info on when I will be giving talks which are open to the public.

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

SPECIAL: AN EXCERPT FROM SOMETHING UNFINISHED

The following is an excerpt from something untitled that I wrote several years ago. It's on the list of writings that will get another look in the future. I thought I'd offer it up in this issue, with many thanks for you subscribing to this newsletter.

You look like hell, dude.

I stood there in the bathroom, looking in the mirror, wondering if I really wanted to go out that night. My hair was still wet from the shower, which accentuated all the gray that had been developing over the last few years. At this point there was more gray than brown up there.

Oh well, at least I still have hair. If I would have taken after Grandpa's side of the family, I would have been bald by now.

My moustache, goatee, and eyebrows were all more gray than brown. But I refused to color it. Might as well look "distinguished", as it used to be called.

I turned sideways and looked at myself. Wearing my favorite blue jeans and a paisley button-up shirt with white parson's collar, I couldn't seem to hide the evidence that age was taking its toll, and I was developing a bit of a gut. I tried to suck it in and look a bit thinner, but wasn't excited about doing that all evening.

Turning back to face the mirror, I started messing with my hair. A cluster was out of place; I wanted it to look good. But the more I messed with it, the more it got out of place. Finally I wet my brush and ran it through my hair, trying to get it all to settle down. Finally I just set the brush down and leaned on the bathroom counter, collecting my thoughts.

It had been months since I had gone out socially, and even longer since I had attended any of casual gatherings held by my old high school friends. There was a time, years ago, when I was going out nearly every weekend, either to listen to a local band playing at one of the clubs in town, or to join friends at some welcoming dive. But now, things were different.

Emily.

When Emily and I were together, every day was a new party. Not literally, but she made life seem like a party. She was so alive, so cheerful, so damn sexy, so sweet and loving, every day with her was a new adventure in affection and fun. I never knew what to expect. There were times that I would find a loving note in my briefcase, or a smiley face. I would find "I love you" notes in the visor on my side of the truck, in the glove box, even in my toolbox.

Coming home from work, worn out from the day, I would hear her singing with the radio before I got in the door, and it always made me smile. The place was just happier and brighter because she was there. A great mom, she was patient when I wasn't, energetic when I wasn't, quiet when I was loud.

And she brought out the best in me too. Because of her, I tried a little harder to be patient, and I worked at being a good companion, a good friend, a good father, and a good husband. She made me want to be all those things.

When we went out together, she always dressed pretty, even if it was casual. Her body was perfect to me, full of lovely curves. She was a delicious 5 feet 4 inches tall, and her legs seemed to go on forever. She knew how to look nice. Her jeans, shorts and skirts all fit nicely, and hugged her curves in the most wonderful way. The colors of her clothing always complimented her light complexion.

I used to lay on our bed and watch her study her clothes and shoes in the closet, running her fingers through her long black hair as she contemplated her outfit for the evening. Laying across the bed, I could watch without her knowing, listening to her hum some random tune as she studied and planned.

Then, when Emily got sick, it all changed. She tried so hard to do all the things she had before, but she was so weak, she couldn't. The word "cancer" had hit both of us like a rock, and when we were told that it was all over her, and that we only had a few weeks left, nothing else mattered but being together. And for me, nothing else mattered except taking care of her, being there for her, all the way to the end, and taking care of the boys as well.

Eventually I couldn't take care of her anymore, and the boys needed more of me too, and I wasn't about to neglect them. We both knew it was near the end, so she had to be hospitalized, in an extended care facility. We all wanted her to be home, but it just wasn't possible. She needed constant attention.

We had a lot of late-night conversations in her room, just she and I. My in-laws, Dave and Margie, were staying at our house near Ash Grove, northwest of Springfield, helping to take care of the boys, who were in their teens at the time. David, our older son, was a sophomore in college, attending Drury University in Springfield, and needed to concentrate as much as possible to keep his grades up. Our other son Jason was a senior in high school, doing well in his classes, and was anxious to graduate as he had already been accepted to Drury as well. So with Dave and Margie there to help, we hoped for some degree of normalcy, if possible, to keep the boys going down their path. David lived on campus, but came home often for dinner, so both boys needed the help from their grandparents. It also allowed me to spend as much time as possible with Emily.

One particular night, after the throngs of people visiting had kissed her gently and left to go home, she looked drained, and I could tell that she was troubled. I turned off all the lights in the room so that the glow of the nightlight in the bathroom was our only illumination. It was the best I could do to create a little softness in the room. I wanted to light candles, but of course that wasn't possible, as she was on oxygen all the time at that point.

"What's wrong, my love?" I asked, barely above a whisper, as I kissed her forehead, just below where her hairline had been.

"You're going to have to find someone else. I want you to find a nice lady." Her voice was raspy.

"Emily, please don't talk like that. I'm certainly not interested in even thinking about other women at this point. My place is here with you, taking care of you, spending time with you." I had to wipe a tear off my cheek.

"You silly boy," she whispered. A whisper was all she had the strength for. "I won't last much longer. I know that. And you're too young to be a bachelor for the rest of your life."

"But..." I interrupted, trying to protest. She raised her tiny boney fingers up to my lips and whispered, "Shhhhhhhhhh. Steve, honey, come on. It's ok. I just want to hear you tell me that someday you will again search for love. I can't rest till you promise me you'll search for someone again."

I was crying by this point. I leaned over and gently kissed her forehead again, as a few of my tears dropped onto her.

"Yes, my love," I choked out, "I promise. Someday I will search for love again."

She slipped away into a coma sometime during the wee hours of the next morning, as I slept in the chair by her bed, holding her hand. We never got to speak again...

I suddenly realized I was still staring at myself in the mirror.

Looking at my watch, I was surprised to see that I had been standing there, thinking all these things for half an hour. Shaking myself back to reality, I knew I needed to get myself together if I was really going to meet up with my friends. I hoped to be up to it.

"Jesus, dude, get it together. You look like hell. Just go have a good time," I said aloud to myself, "If you have a rotten time or run out of people to talk with, you can just leave!"

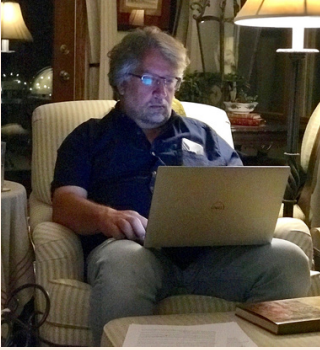
I finally settled down, shut off the light, grabbed a jacket and headed downstairs. Leaving a few lights on for security, I walked nervously out the back door, double-checking the lock a few times.

Maybe the truck won't start.

It sounded like a good excuse to not go. I climbed in and turned the key, and it fired up just like always.

"I guess I'm going!" I said, heading down my long winding driveway that lead to the main road. Waiting at the gate for it to take its own sweet time opening, I looked at my watch. Pulling through, I stopped to make sure the gate closed behind me, then turned onto Bull Creek Road and headed out, scared to death.

Want to read more? Drop me a line and let me know.



BEHIND THE SCENES WITH PRESENTATIONS

Now that I have seven regular monthly clients for presentations, and three of them have me come in twice each month, plus a multitude of organizations that have me come to speak two to four times each year, the business of giving talks has become nearly full time. The planning and scheduling, research, actual computer time creating the presentation, and yes even invoicing has become quite the job, and I spend roughly 60 hours each month handling all of it. But as you know, I love it, and I thought you might want to read a bit from behind the scenes...

Since first starting to do this on a regular basis back in 2019, and as it has grown by leaps and bounds, I have written a total of 91 presentations. Some of them are talks about trips that my wife and I took, either overseas or within the U.S. Those talks were presented to some of the senior living facilities, and basically will never be seen again. Others that I wrote for the senior facilities, that include stories of the lives of famous or historic people, will also most likely not be seen again, as their appeal to other organizations is limited. The general history or entertainment talks, though, which currently total 36 talks, remain very popular with historical societies, libraries, and civic organizations. Several more will be written in 2025, including The Battle of Little Bighorn and The Ride of Paul Revere.

One thoroughly irritating thing surfaced a few weeks ago, and has forced me to go back through my most popular presentations. I use Microsoft Powerpoint for all of these talks. I know many Apple users sing the praises of their slideshow tool, but I am a Windows guy. Back to my irritation, Microsoft decided some time ago to update Powerpoint, and when they did, they removed several great fonts. Care to guess how many presentations used some of those fonts that have now been removed? So far I've had to revise eight talks, and the number will continue to climb as I take the time to get through all of them to fix the problem. Argh!

I wanted to let you know that I am considering many things for the coming months and years, and one thing which is particularly exciting is the idea of taking one of my talks to the international stage:

You know I love podcasts, especially those that deal with history, and one of my favorites is called "We Have Ways of Making You Talk". It's hosted by a couple of famous gents from England, and it is all about the Second World War. As an avid listener, I was excited to go to England last year for their annual festival, aptly called WeHaveWaysFest. At the festival they have a multitude of speakers from around the world, presenting on various topics. As you might expect, I'm excited to go again this year.



Left, the logo for the podcast, hosted by comedian, author and historian Al Murray, and author and historian James Holland. Right, the logo for last year's festival.

As you might expect, every year the festival sends out a Call for Speakers. There's a form to fill out, describing what your proposed talk would be. I stared at that form for a long time this year...

Last December I gave a talk at the Fair Grove American Legion Post about Parker's Crossroads, the scene of an historic stand by American troops in the early stages of the Battle of the Bulge. With only 300+ men, they held up two German tank divisions for five days. It is a spectacular story, one of hundreds of heroic stands made by Allied soldiers during the Bulge. The crossroads is now home to a large, heavily used traffic circle, and a small area commemorating the events of that standoff.

I was so tempted to apply to give that talk at this year's fest. Ultimately I decided against it *for now*. I currently have so many irons in the fire, and quite frankly do not have the bandwidth to add something like that. On the form, they want to know what primary sources you plan to use to create your talk, which requires digging into regimental histories and such. That's some intense research above and beyond what I currently have invested in the existing presentation. So I decided to hold off on presenting, and just spend another year enjoying being a participant.

But I'm telling you, if I can get a few writing projects completed and off my plate, I'm going to seriously consider investing the time to further research Parker's Crossroads, and apply to speak at WeHaveWaysFest 2026. The audience will include folks from the UK, France, Germany, The Netherlands, Belgium, Japan, and many other countries around the world. I'll keep you posted!



WHAT DO YOU DO WITH THE BOOKS YOU DON'T WISH TO KEEP?

If you're like me, you read *a lot*. And you accumulate a bunch of books, don't you? What do you do with the books you don't plan to read again?

For many years, I never parted with a book. Even if I hated it, I wouldn't get rid of it. But of course, eventually you find yourself staring at a pile of books where your furniture used to be.

(I'm kidding)

But seriously, what do you do with the books you don't plan to read again?

These are two of three bookcases in my office. As you can see, it's pretty much overflowing.



Nearly the entire left bookcase used to be filled with books pertaining to the American Civil War. I began to thin them out several years ago, and now the Civil War section is just the bottom two shelves. The middle shelf has my Second World War books, and various local and regional history books fill the top shelf. The shorter bookshelf to the right has my Poe books on the upper shelf, along with some Ambrose Bierce, H.G. Wells, books by my cousin Steve Moore, and others.

I mentioned the thinning out of my Civil War books, because eventually I realized that I just wasn't going to devote time to reread many of them. Additionally I had several other books I didn't plan to read again. So it was time to part with them.

I know many folks donate their unwanted books to thrift stores, and that certainly is a good way to redistribute them. Others donate to their local library for their annual fundraising book sale. That's another excellent opportunity to do some good for your local library.

Another option is a local historical society, if they have a research library. I have a set of books, unfortunately incomplete with Volumes 1, 2, 5, and 6, of the Civil War rosters for Iowa regiments. This set was printed in 1911 and bound in thick leather covers. They are amazing, but I've perused them and am now ready to move them along. The historical society in Winterset, Iowa has been very helpful to me in the past, and they have a wonderful research library and staff at their museum. I'm not going to ship these books, as they are far too delicate, so the next time I make a pilgrimage to Winterset to revisit some old family haunts, I'm going to donate those books to the research library there.

I have another idea I'd like to pass along, in case you have some books you'd like to donate.

When I started doing presentations on a regular basis to senior living facilities, as I became familiar with their offerings, I discovered that most of them have some sort of library. Some have a specific room with nice shelves and a table or two, along with a volunteer keeping things organized. Others have a bookcase along a wall and that's about it. But at least the opportunity to borrow and read books is there.

Now I don't want to suggest that you just start dumping books on your local nursing home. However I would like to suggest that you consider dropping by to visit with them and see if they have a library and would like to receive book donations. If they are open to it, I'm sure they would appreciate you helping them provide their residents with reading material. Otherwise, if they pass on the idea, it probably means they don't have the facilities for it, or the manpower to sort through donations. But it's worth the kind gesture.

As you can see, my book collection is bulging at the seams. I've got a bag of books ready to donate, and from the looks of things, I'll be able to fill another one in no time. No matter how you decide to donate your unwanted books, I hope you take great joy in finding them a new home, and manage to fill the space left behind with more books!

PRESENTATION UPDATE

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



March:

17th: "Chasing the Chadwick Line" I'll be presenting this talk to the Christian County Retired Teachers Association at the library in Nixa.

April:

15th: "The Hunt for John Wilkes Booth" This will be held at Monroe Coffee Co. in Fair Grove. As always, I start talking at 7:00p.m.

18th: "The April 1880 Tornado Outbreak" I will be at the Webster County Historical Society in Marshfield, which meets at the Marshfield Senior Center, 427 W. Washington Street. Note this is a date change. Due to conflicting schedules, the historical society had to change their meeting date. This will now take place on the actual anniversary of the deadly tornado in Marshfield.

19th: "The April 1880 Tornado Outbreak" This time I will be giving this talk at the Republic Library, and will start at 10:30a.m.

May:

As of right now, nothing extra scheduled.

June:

7th - 8th: I won't be speaking but will be participating in the annual Between the Pages Writers' Conference in Springfield. If you're a writer and interested in this conference, stay tuned to my Facebook page for future posts with information about this great annual event.

July:

As of right now, nothing extra scheduled.

August:

As of right now, nothing extra scheduled.

My regular speaking engagements, twice each month, continue at the three Elfindale senior living facilities in Springfield. Also, I present monthly at The Preston Senior Living Facility, Elfindale Manor, Mission Ridge, and now Turner's Rock.