

On August 27, we received the very sad news that acclaimed lawyer and author Peter Baird had died at 3:30 that morning. His death at St. Joseph's Hospital in Phoenix was due to chronic lymphatic leukemia, which revealed itself suddenly and took its toll quickly.

Peter's talents were vast. He was recognized nationally as a great attorney, one who worked on scores of important matters, Miranda simply being the most well-known bullet point on his c.v.

He also was a friend, to his colleagues across the country and locally, to those who needed lawyers and couldn't afford them, and to this magazine and its grateful staff.

Almost exactly one month before he passed, Peter sent us this article for consideration. He thought that many lawyers who pined to pen a novel might take solace in it. We agree. Though in the future we may have the privilege of publishing some of Peter's past best work, here we present his final original writing that he wanted to share with his fellows.

## So You Want To Write A Book?

Have you ever yearned to be another John Grisham or Scott Turow? Even if your pipe dreams aren't that grand, have you ever thought or talked about writing a book "someday"? Have you already written a draft that is hidden in a desk drawer somewhere?

To those lawyers who answered "Yes" to at least one of those questions, I urge you to start writing and never quit—no matter what. One thing to remember is this: Writing a book "ain't" for sissies, and I ought to know.

It took me 14 years to write *Beyond Peleliu* (Ravenhawk Books, 2006), a novel about the generational impact of World War Two combat on a Utah physician and a San Francisco trial lawyer. It took me 25 years to write *Protecting Moscow From The Soviets* (National Writers Press, 2008), a collection of essays from publications as notable as *The New York Times Magazine*, *Newsweek* and *The Wall Street Journal* and as obscure as *Hope*, *Rosebud* and *Interrace*.

The Book Gods are a brutal bunch. That's why my pool of rejected manuscripts is now an ocean of slush. My royalties have been pathetic. My Amazon sales rankings have never been better than 6,000. Moreover, because I am no Stephen King and because my publishers are small, print-on-demand houses, there have been no book tours, publicists or marketing agents. And there has been precious little shelf space.

Yet, I love to write and have ever since I wrote for my high school newspaper ("Hoopsters drop another one in the mud"). My passion continued with term papers in college ("Nietzsche v. Nihilism: Why?"), law school memoranda ("The Exciting History of Strict Liability for Cladisporium Rot") and briefs in my law practice ("The appellant has turned a sow's ear into a silk purse, but we can still hear the oink").

My first publication was a 1967 law review article. The title—"A Study of Arizona Lease Terminations"—was clunky; the writing was even worse. And, if there is a merciful God, the only person who ever read that drivel was a hapless linotype operator. Unabashed, I went on for years grinding out articles with leaden titles and numbing prose.

In June 1983, my writing life changed when *The New York Times Magazine* started a weekly column called "About Men." The guest authors wrote with such uncluttered brevity, unflinching

honesty and powerful authenticity that I wanted to write like that. More to the point, I *had* to write like that.

Indeed, I was so captivated by the essay form that I devoured the works of E. B. White, Russell Baker, Roger Rosenblatt and Calvin Trillin. I also started to write my own essays and, with naive enthusiasm, submitted them to the publications listed in *The Writer's Digest*.

Soon, I was swimming upstream in a river of rejection slips, something wholly unanticipated and deeply demoralizing.

Eventually, I learned to cope with rejection by reading, re-reading and re-re-reading André Bernard's *Rotten Rejections* (Pushcart Press, 1990). Bernard wrote about famous writers like Tony Hillerman, whose *The Blessing Way* generated this rejection slip: "Get rid of all that Indian stuff." And Rudyard Kipling's submission came back with this note: "I'm sorry, Mr. Kipling, but you just don't know how to use the English language." My harshest rejection slip—"Please, no more submissions"—was tame by comparison.



**PETER BAIRD** was a partner with Lewis and Roca LLP in Phoenix, where he practiced for 43 years. His last book was *Protecting Moscow From The Soviets* (National Writers Press, 2008), which won first place at the 2009 San Francisco Book Festival for "Collections/Anthologies." He also wrote a novel, *Beyond Peleliu* (Ravenhawk Books, 2006), as well as articles for many magazines and newspapers, including *The New York Times Magazine*, *Newsweek*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *Arizona Attorney*. Peter passed away on Aug. 27, 2009.

**BY PETER BAIRD**

Finally, on July 7, 1991, *The New York Times Magazine* ran my own "About Men" column titled "Forgiveness." It was a watershed moment, because "Forgiveness" caught the attention of an agent, who insisted that I could, should and must write a novel and publish a collection of essays. Moreover, that essay legitimized me as a writer, facilitated the publication of more essays and gave me the strength to endure 14 years of well-deserved failure as I struggled with my novel, *Beyond Peleliu*.

Many novelists are naturally gifted, formally trained and professionally edited, but I'm not one of them. To learn how to write fiction, I had to do the same things I had done to learn how to write essays: study, write, submit and fail. Because I didn't major in English and have never taken a creative writing course, I started my

self-directed education, logically enough, with E. M. Forster's classic *Aspects of the Novel* (Harcourt Brace & Co., 1927), but found it too Nineteenth Century and too academic. When Forster failed me, I went back and re-read my two favorite fiction writers—Raymond Carver and Ernest Hemingway—and soaked my soul in their spare styles and earthy power.

Once marinated, I started reading "how-to" books about plot, voice, dialogue, showing not telling, scene, character and all manner of do's and don'ts. The most helpful books were Renne Browne and David King, *Self-Editing for Fiction Writers* (Harper Collins, 1993), John Gardner, *On Becoming a Novelist* (Perennial, 1983), and Will Blythe, *Why I Write (Thoughts on the Craft of Fiction)* (Back Bay Books, 1999). I'm slightly embarrassed to admit this, but I needed more than personal experience to write sex scenes, and thus relied on Elizabeth Benedict's *The Joy of Writing Sex: A Guide for Fiction Writers* (Owl Books, 2002) for technical assistance.

Armed with my newly acquired how-to skills, I started to write what I thought was fiction but was in fact gobbledygook. Unlike legal writing and essay writing, which require boiled-down information and straight-to-the-point nouns and verbs, long fiction is not a slam-bam form. So I had to learn patience in building plots and developing characters, brick-by-brick, over an extended number of pages. Each time I took a shortcut with a flashback or a flash-forward, the story died. Each time I made up information without having first done factual research, the story wilted.

The greatest challenge was to learn that what goes on inside the minds and emotions of my characters is just as significant as what goes on outside those characters. Thus, I stopped writing like a lawyer, stopped fixating on the objective and rewrote the manuscript so that readers would know the inner feelings of my characters—whether they were in court during trial or in bed during copulation.

Of course, there have been tangible though fleeting rewards, like riffling through printed pages for the first time, reading a generous review and winning a first place in the 2009 San Francisco Book Festival. Yet, the

real reward has been finding answers, feelings and imaginings inside myself that I never knew existed and that were long overdue. **BT**