

## Creative Living

Marie McGee editor/591-2300



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(71E)

## Think you've got the write stuff?



Bettie Cannon does her writing from an office in her home.

By Ramona Grigg  
special writer

**A**H, THE WRITING life! Breathes there a would-be writer who hasn't been stirred by visions of hobnobbing with the likes of a Malter or a Michener, a Welty or a Walker?

(Or, closer to home, a Leonard, a Luedtke, a Kienzle or a Coughlin?) And, after all, what is a writer? Nothing more than a person who writes. Seems simple enough: You put thoughts into words, the words become inkstains on paper, and before you know it, you've got something.

"I could do that," the reader cries, tossing aside a paperback representing months or even years of work by an author. And maybe the reader is right — the jury is still out on whether the talent or sheer tenacity makes the writer.

"I USED TO THINK that good writing came from an inborn, innate talent," said West Bloomfield writer Bettie Cannon, a past president of Detroit Women Writers, "but I've seen too many cases of people who were so passionate about wanting to write, they just didn't quit until, by golly, they had done it."

A case in point might be Julia Grice, the prolific author of a dozen historical romances who just recently returned from a nationwide publicity tour to promote her latest book, "How to Find Romance After 40."

Grice began writing some 20 years ago, and wrote six full-length novels — all unpublished — "with two small kids underfoot" before she finally hit the jackpot in 1979 with her first book, "Lovefire."

"I guess I'm just the eternal optimist," the 45-year-old Rochester writer says. "I just know I could write a good book. I don't look back on those failed books as a waste of time. That was my apprenticeship."

**THEN THERE'S ROBERT C. Wilson**, 35-year-old author of two Michigan-based bestsellers, "Crooked Tree" and "Icefire." Wilson, who lives in Redford, had never written a word of fiction, outside of a required college composition class, when he took a leave from his job as an attorney in the Wayne County Prosecutor's office in the fall of 1976 to hole up in his parent's cabin up north — to begin work on a novel.

**'I guess my advice to them would be to realize that dreamy-eyed talent just isn't enough. It takes a lot of hard work and disappointment. Sometimes you say to yourself, 'I don't have to do this — I have some other things to do' — but the true writer knows deep inside that there's something in you . . . that you'd be more miserable not writing than you ever were writing.'**

—Bettie Cannon  
Detroit Women Writers past president

"I knew there would be bears in my story and that it would take place in the northern Michigan woods, but it wasn't until I came across an old Ottawa Indian legend about the bearwalk — where bears could be inhabited by human entities — that the whole thing came together. Then it was, 'What if this happened?' and 'what if that happened?'"

Wilson's is one of the few instant success stories. He sent a couple of chapters and an outline of his first draft of "Crooked Tree" to an agent, "just to see if the thing was worth going on with."

The agent took it on and sold it to G.P. Putnam's Sons, who also published "Icefire" and have an option on Wilson's third novel, still at least a year away from being completed.

**CANNON, THE** author of "All About Franklin," the history of Franklin Village and a freelance writer whose works are frequently published in area newspapers, grew up in a writing family.

Her mother- and grandmother-wrote stories and poetry and one of her uncles was Don Whitehead, Pulitzer-prize-winning Associated Press war correspondent and the author of 10 books. Another uncle was the editor of "the only newspaper in Harlan County, Ky."

Cannon says, "growing up with them, writing just seemed within the realm of possibility. At 14, I had written two novels — 'Gone with the Winds' revisited, as I recall."

Still, she didn't begin writing "in earnest" until some 20 years ago when Cannon was in her mid-40s.

write thing to do."

Wilson says, about rejections, "Sure, rejections are tough — but there are no easy parts to writing. The writing process itself is one series of tortures after another."

That's not to say there's no pleasure involved, he is quick to add.

"The enjoyment comes when you've finished something — a section or a chapter — and you realize that it not only crystallizes exactly what you wanted to say, but that you've done it in what you think is a good, literary fashion. There's no feeling like it. You accomplished what you set out to do and you did it well."

**STILL, TO SOME,** rejections can be devastating. "After a couple of them, sometimes perfectly good writers just stop trying, Cannon observed.

"Intellectually, they know that rejections are necessary evils, but emotionally it just hurts too much."

"I guess my advice to them would be to realize that dreamy-eyed talent just isn't enough. It takes a lot of hard work and disappointment. Sometimes you say to yourself, 'I don't have to do this — I have other things to do' — but the true writer knows deep inside that there's something in you . . . that you'd be more miserable not writing than you ever were writing."

And what advice would they give to the beginning writer?

"I'd tell them 'Just get started and never look back,'" said Wilson. "Don't worry about the quality or grammar at first — just tell the story."

Grice says, "Never give up and never be ashamed of your failures. The most important things about me are my failures. They made me stronger."

And Cannon says, "I guess I'd give the advice my uncle used to always give: 'Apply the seat of your pants to the chair and stay there until you're finished.'"

Recently mystery writer William Kienzle spoke in Livonia and had this comment to make to beginning writers:

"The average yearly income of a writer, according to a recent study, is about \$4,000," he said. "So, if you have a book published, you'd better have a good job, too — unless the book is picked up by book clubs, published in paperback, in foreign languages, or movie rights are sold."

Special writer Victoria Diaz contributed to this story.

## Workshops can help

Writing, as everybody who's done it knows, is a profession that requires maddening solitude. You have to think to write. Thinking requires concentration, even if it's done while lying on your back staring up at the clouds.

Even those authors who collaborate admit their best contributions come only after being alone to think things out. Most successful collaborators get together to iron out the kinks, to zero in on the glitches, then separate again in order to do the real thinking.

**FOR SOME WRITERS,** conferences and workshops are a welcome relief. They provide a chance to talk to other writers, both beginners and veterans; to compare work; to offer or accept encouragement.

Each year, in their May issues, both the Writer (120 Boylston Street, Boston 02116) and the Writer's Digest (693 Alliance Road, Cincinnati 45242) list conferences and workshops across the country. This

year there are at least 16 listings in Michigan alone. Here are the dates and addresses of some of them:

- 25th Annual Writer's Conference, Detroit Women Writers/Oakland University, Oct. 17-18. Write to Katherine Z. Rowley, Division of Continuing Education, Oakland University, Rochester 49365.

- Midland Writers Conference, June 7. Write to Margaret Allen, Gayle Burkhardt, in care of Grace A. Dow Library, 1710 W. St. Andrews Road, Midland 48640.

- Maranatha Christian Writers Seminar, June 23-27. Write Sandra Aldrich, 4759 Lake Harbor Road, Muskegon 49441.

- Eighth Annual Bay de Noc Writers' Conference, June 20-21. Write Larry Leffel, Bay de Noc Community College, Escanaba 49829.

- Michigan Northwest Writers Conference, July 13-18. Write Sue Packington, The Leelanau Center for Education, Box W, Glen Arbor 49636.

## He draws fine line between carving, painting

By Marie McGee  
staff writer

**T**HE STAGE is set in the little town of Clare for the second annual Michigan Great Lakes Wildlife Festival this weekend.

And all set to make the trek up there is Livonia carver-artist Bob Perrish who already has several awards under belt and the competitive season is just beginning.

Perrish will compete in three events: Michigan Ducks Unlimited carver of the year contest, Michigan Duck Stamp Competition and Michigan Great Lakes Wildlife photographer of the year contest. The photography competition is new this year.

The Livonia artist will be in some prestigious company. Included in the art show and sale that will be part of the festival will be the works of 1985 Michigan Ducks Unlimited art of the year Russell Cobane and Michigan DU carver of the year Jon Jones. Cobane is also the 1986 print artist of the year and winner of the 1986 Michigan Duck Stamp contest.

For collectors, the hotel will host an antique decoy display and sale. Headquarters for all the events will be the Hotel Doherty in downtown Clare.

**WITH ONE OF** his paintings, Perrish has placed third this year in the Michigan Duck Stamp Competition after finishing second in 1985. He finished in the top 30, of 1,200 entries, at this year's Federal Duck Stamp competition.

For his carving, he took a top place in species in the World Competition and second best in the marsh duck competition. Last year, he took best of show in his professional class entry at Point Mouillee Midwest Decoy Competition and second best of

**The work of National Ducks Unlimited artist Harold Roe, Michigan DU artist of the year Russell Cobane and Michigan DU carver of the year Jon Jones will be on display this week at the Michigan Great Lakes Wildlife Festival in Clare's Hotel Doherty. An antique decoy display and sale will also take place.**

show at the Canadian National Decoy (amateur division) and best of show in the Mid Atlantic Waterfowl Festival Show (professional) in Ver Beech, Va.

Perrish has the advantage of being both a painter and a carver.

For me, painting the duck is like being on the home stretch," he smiled. For the non-painting carvers, it's a different story. Once the carving is done, some of the hardest work is still ahead for them.

A NATIVE Detroitier who grew up in Allen Park, Perrish now lives in Livonia. After attending the University of Michigan and the Center of Creative Studies, Perrish has spent the last 12 years in the field of commercial and fine art.

From layout and design to painting commissioned portraits and murals, he finds himself most at home painting or carving wildlife. An avid sportsman, he became interested in carving decoys after taking an adult education class in carving with his dad.

His first attempt was a three-inch miniature decoy, but it was a big

enough challenge to change the direction of his artistic endeavors.

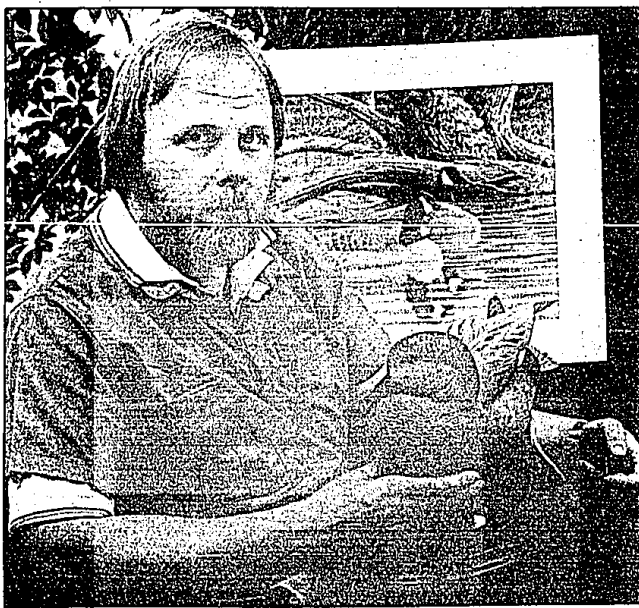
From the very beginning, his attention to detail and subtle use of color has captured the judges' eyes.

**CURRENTLY,** PERRISH is employed in the art department of Michigan Consolidated Gas Co. Before that, he was in business for himself as a commercial artist. The long hours and not having any time for himself prompted him to take the Michigan assignment, he said.

"I like it this way. I work all day, come home and take care of my family obligations and have time to do what I want for myself. When you're in business for yourself, you have to do everything — the books, the ordering, the selling. You're always doing what everyone else wants."

Later this spring, Perrish will attend a week-long seminar by noted wildlife artist Robert Bateman. Even being accepted for that is a high honor.

Bob Perrish's work is on display and available at Wild Wings galleries.



Bob Perrish holds the prize-winning gadwall marsh duck that won him an award at the World Competition recently in Ocean City,

Md. In the background is one of his paintings of Canada geese.

BILL DREBLER/staff photographer