

## A radio program where 'survival' goes beyond ratings

For anyone who thinks studying history is either a mundane or academic exercise, talk to Nerses (Nick) Serkain.

And make no mistake about it, if you want to talk, Serkain of Northville could never be accused of walking away from a conversation.

He is a lovable bear with an utterly infectious smile, a streak of righteousness, and a sense of history that traces the emergence of those he calls "his people" 1700 years back.

A time when the Armenian nation became the first country to endorse Christianity. A fact that Serkain proudly states as if it were just covered on the nightly news.

In the next breath, he will chronicle the centuries-long religious persecution suffered by the Armenian people, who today number about 7 million worldwide.

including 40,000 in metro Detroit.

**What:** "The Armenian Radio Hour," hosted by Nerses (Nick) Serkain, a program of music, cultural announcements and news  
**When:** 10-11 a.m. Sundays  
**Where:** WNZK-AM 690, Southfield  
For information: (248) 349-1193. Tax-deductible donations can be made to: The Armenian Radio Hour, 45755 Bloomcrest Drive, Northville, MI 48067.

### Faith, the only constant

Serkain is the longtime host of "The Armenian Radio Hour." Now in its 55th year, the program, which airs Sunday mornings on Southfield's WNZK-AM 690, is the longest-running ethnic radio broadcast in the country. The show began in 1943.

Initially, it was a main source of information

about Armenian immigrants who had relocated to North America from their homeland, which stretched from parts of Iran and Turkey to the Armenian Socialist Soviet Republic.

The Soviet Armenian Republic claimed its independence from the former Soviet Union in 1991.

If you think you know history because you've read a few books, maybe watched several documentaries, talk to Serkain. His parents'



**Cultural pride:** The baritone voice of Nick Serkain has welcomed listeners for the last 31 years.

stories of immigration sound like Hollywood-size epics.

He lives history every day. Before long, you'll be drawn into his world. A place of deep faith where immoral acts have been committed against "his people." And faith is the only constant, the only indicator that life is more than a mere coincidence.

**Indelible date**  
Serkain carries a list of some of the most successful Armenians in the metro area. Then, he reaches across the table to pat your hand as he tells you the story of the Armenia Diaspora, and how millions of Armenians fled the 1916 Holocaust at the hands of the Turks.

The indelible date, April 24, 1915, is etched in his memory, and also on the cassette of a recent radio program, "Armenian Genocide," that he carries with him.

Even after all the tellings about the genocide, his eyes still well-up and his throat becomes tense at the thought of the slaughter of those who couldn't find an escape route.

Serkain takes history personally. Listening to his resonant voice, deepened by years of smoking, it's clear that he isn't speaking for himself.

But rather than become hardened by hatred or callous with racism, he's filled with ethnic pride and a

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## A literary chameleon awaits a breakthrough

### LATHRUP VILLAGE NOVELIST EVADES PIGEONHOLING

Inside the cluttered Cape Cod house along the gravel road rolling toward a cul-de-sac, a lean figure wearing his trademark short-brim navy cap finds his way in and out of the boxy rooms. He doesn't sit still. He moves with the fluidity and efficiency of the one-time world-class swimmer that he was.

Fish out of water? Hardly. But paradoxes are indeed plentiful for author Thomas Sullivan, who has found out that "making it" in the world of contemporary literature is more like training for the deaththon, than an all-out 200-meter breaststroke.

"My best works are still in my file cabinets," said Sullivan of Lathrup Village, a former English teacher at Dearborn Fordson High School, who took an early retirement three years ago to devote himself full time to a writing career.

"By and large, you have to be who you are. If you write to be rich or famous, you'll be neither. You write because it's what you have to do." Since his novel, "The Phases of Henry Moon" was nominated for a Pushcart Award and drew critical comparisons to John Irving's acclaimed 1978 novel, "The World According to Garp," Sullivan has been one of the best kept secrets in the publishing world, seeming to be on the verge of breaking on to the national scene.

He's still writing and waiting, if anyone hadn't noticed.

### Heart-pounding prose

In March, his latest novel, "The Martyring," drew

praise from his colleagues but hasn't quite gained a mainstream audience. It's an attempt, admits Sullivan, to become more commercial. Although by no means has Sullivan compromised his desire to write in a more literary style. A psychological-murder thriller with a character who noted crime novelist William Kienzle calls "the most ghoulish creature since Hannibal Lecter," "The Martyring" is an eerie, and at times, dizzying page-turner.

A self-described "chameleon," Sullivan is neither a casual observer nor a stylist who can be easily pigeonholed in a niche genre.

Sullivan bristles at the mere suggestion of a literary yoke.

"My writing fits a lot of different categories, but really I don't fit in any one place," said Sullivan, who has more than 70 published stories in a range of genres, including science fiction, mystery, horror and literary prose.

"I'm that oddball that stands out because you can't put a label on me. It's for the best and worse."

"The Martyring," demonstrates Sullivan's ability to cross genres. His evocative, heart-pounding passages, according to novelist Loren D. Estleman, resound "with the artistic detail of a Nabokov or a Fitzgerald while providing the page-turning suspense of John Grisham."

That sounds like a formula for critical and popular success.

Yet Sullivan's books have yet to land on the best-seller's list or bring long-term publishing deals, although an earlier effort, "Born Burning," is under

consideration by Vista Studio's executive Jacob Slatter, who produced "Top Gun."

### Ink brothers

With the intricate and idiosyncratic attention to detail that distinguishes his novels, Sullivan has organized the rooms of his house as various writing enclaves, each arranged with the precision of pieces on a chess board.

Somewhere between the upstairs loft where works of his cherished Russian novelists line the bookshelves and the Thorataque screened-in back porch, he has marked his literary strategy.

In nearly every room, stacks of writing paper have been placed alongside a desk lamp, pens and pencils. Collectively, the rooms appear to be a literary assembly process that eventually winds its way to the converted first-floor bedroom where a 17-inch monitor hovers over a keyboard where Sullivan edits his manuscripts and short stories. About every two weeks, he gets together with Estleman, a prolific writer of westerns and crime mysteries who lives in Whitmore Lake. They read and comment on each other's works.

"We speak a language that no one else would understand," said Sullivan.

The self-described "ink brothers" also share a vision that Sullivan sums up as: "A rainbow of emotions starting with irreverent satire, bitter inquiry and a redeeming, childlike innocence and faith."

Sullivan dedicated "The Martyring" to Estleman, who he described as "an ink brother - the indelible

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## AT THE GALLERIES

### Two painters whose craftsmanship transcend their art

Versatility, craftsmanship and a sophisticated sense of composition are distinguishing features in the paintings of two fascinating exhibits at the Creative Arts Center in Pontiac, and the David Klein Gallery in Birmingham.

The works of Richard Wilt, a former University of Michigan professor who died in 1981, and emerging west coast artist William Glen Crooks offer contrasts in terms of style, but both share

an uncompromising view of their subjects.

Whereas Wilt seems intent on incorporating major trends of the 20th century (e.g. cubism, abstractionism, symbolism), the younger artist, Crooks, is more traditional in his representational paintings of open fields and rural landscapes.

And whereas Wilt's work is more diverse, eclectic and experimental, Crooks offers more coherent composi-

tions that rely less on clever design, and more on a subtle aesthetic.

Considered together, the exhibits are a compelling reminder of the power of interpretative painters to leave their distinctive impressions.

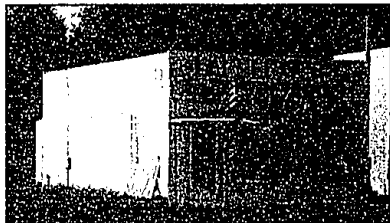
### "Richard Wilt, 1940-1962" at Creative Arts Center

In a retrospective of Wilt's early work, the Creative Arts Center of Pontiac has put together a diverse show

from the artist's formative years. The series of oils, pen and ink, water-colors and richly textured canvases depict a craftsman coming of age.

Despite the diversity, Wilt's energy and ability to synthesize many styles comes through: the dynamic movement of geometric forms with a loose-style cubism, the explosions of color in the tradition of abstract expressionism,

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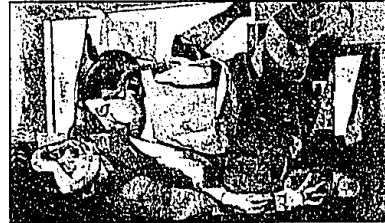


**Enlightened:** William Glen Crooks' paintings capture natural light falling on distinctive southwestern settings.

### Exhibits

• "New Paintings by William Glen Crooks"  
When: Through Saturday, Aug. 8  
Where: David Klein Gallery, 163 Townsend, Birmingham, (248) 433-3700

• Works of Richard Wilt  
When: Recently extended through Monday, Sept. 7  
Where: Creative Arts Center, 47 Williams St., between Huron St. (M-59) and Orchard Lake Rd., Pontiac, (248) 333-7849



**Across worlds:** Richard Wilt's paintings are distinguished by both abstract and figurative elements, and a textured surface.