

Novelist

Michael Croft is a local author and Reno native who spent his youth hanging out around his father's motel, the Parkway, on Sierra Street. He teaches small writing workshops in his home. Learn more by visiting michaelcroftworkshops.com.

When did you know you were going to be a writer?

I got interested in it in college. And, initially, I was very taken with a professor. He's no longer with us—Dr. Ahmed Essa. And I enjoyed taking English classes from him. ... I was a business major pretty much by family dictate. So every semester would roll around, and I'd look in the schedule to see which classes Dr. Essa was teaching. So I took all of these English classes, and I'd say, "Well, I'll take all of those business classes next semester." This was a distinct moment. I was standing outside on the patio of the student union, overlooking Manzanita Lake, going through the catalog for the upcoming semester. I'd taken all of the classes I could take from him. The only thing I could take was a creative writing class. ... I liked him, but I thought, "Writing, no, I don't want to do that." I went ahead and, during that time, something just happened. ... I went in indifferent, and I left that semester intense, ready to go. And I knew I needed more, and so I was very fortunate in that time to meet



PHOTO/JERI DAVIS

a writer by the name of Floyd Salas. He took me under his wing. ... I moved to San Francisco and ... I got a degree in creative writing. ... I came back with two desires—to go into the clubs and work part-time and to start writing a novel. ... And one novel led to another.

You've do different types of writing.

In fact, I finished a novel just a couple of months ago. I'm getting ready to cast it out into the world. But I'm much more prudent about that step than I used to be. ... And in the interim, I know that when my baby leaves the house, I'll need to do something. So I'm going to be writing a short story. ... And then I've taught. ... I started and directed the TMCC Writers' Conference for 16 years.

Tell me about your new workshops.

Well, we started about a year ago. And I've been in workshops. I've taught some

workshops in the past. I tell incoming people that we're going to sit around my dining room table and have adult conversations about stories. And if I could, I would do that every night. Sit there with four or five people and solve the riddle of the story. That surpasses anything on cable. ... And I know that writers tend to be isolated. And trying to reach them is a challenge—but also being one of those isolated people, I've certainly experienced that. You need your privacy to write, but to bring a story or a novel to fruition, you need other people. That's a fact. And I strongly believe if you want to write, one of the things you need to do is help that writer sitting next to you. ... Some people are a little nervous about coming in. I go to great lengths, for a lot of reasons, to create an environment that's very comfortable and inviting. All levels are encouraged. Floyd Salas said to me one time, "Do you know the definition of novel?" He said, "New every time. So, no matter how much experience you have, you're always starting over." You go back to the beginning state. ... I stress reading with generosity. It's an absolute must. We always start out speaking to the strength in any piece. ... And then we start to build. The things that aren't working, simply aren't working. They're not a statement on a person's talent—absolutely not. That's just the process. I stress daydreaming on paper. We encourage mistakes. Those mistakes can be discoveries. □

NOTES FROM THE NEON BABYLON

BY BRUCE VAN DYKE

Money, tariffs and divination

OK, so you've got a person named Sam, and Sam does a job. You pay Sam a certain amount X to do this job. Whether Sam is Samuel or Samantha, it just doesn't seem all that difficult to grasp the concept that Sam should get paid that X amount no matter his or her gender. Am I missing something here? What exactly is the complex existential challenge posed by this equal pay thing? Or is it not the concept that's the challenge, but the actual execution of the concept? Whatever the case, we can once again see a situation where it's obvious we're not exactly grappling with nuclear physics here—but grappling with yet another instance of firmly entrenched assholeism disguised, as firmly entrenched assholeism so often is, as tradition. To which modern American gals rightly proclaim, "Phooey!"

You know, that Impossible Burger at Burger King ain't bad. It really is a reasonable facsimile of an actual hamburger. The main ingredients, if you haven't Googled it up, are a soybean blend worked up with coconut oil, sunflower oil and potato protein, with just a dash of soylect green for that special finishing touch. Aha! So this is how Trump is gonna make it up to Midwestern soybean farmers for ruining their gigantic Asian markets with his wacky tariff jive. He's gonna morph the American fast food burger business into a gigantic, churning Soybean Scene as Impossible Imitators explode into action.

Time for another spot-on quote from one of the all-time quotable journalists, the great H.L. Mencken, who once observed, "The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed,

and hence clamorous to be led to safety, by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary."

Of course, the gold standard of Mencken quotes is this one, which is obviously deserving of revival: "As democracy is perfected, the office of the President represents, more and more closely, the inner soul of the people. We move toward a lofty ideal. On some great and glorious day, the plain folks of the land will reach their heart's desire at last, and the White House will be adorned by a downright moron." Ouch! And touche! (Let's give H.L. some Nostradamian style points for that call, which he uncorked in a column 99 years ago, July 1920.)

Joe Walsh, Republican candidate for President, on the Nevada Re-trumplicans decision to cancel its party caucus in order to kiss Agent Orange ass: "It's utter bullshit." □



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