

THE WRITERS' BEAT

EDITED BY ANNIE DAWID

“The Thinking Cabin” by Annie Dawid.

My beloved calls it the “thinking cabin,” or sometimes, the “writing shack.” I had meant to name it “Le Cabanon,” after my professor’s private space in the South of France. Behind his home in the hills, he directed me down a path through the lavender to a little outbuilding, maybe 15 x 30 square feet. Inside, I felt like I had entered a sacred space: very simple, sparse, holy. A desk and chair, some book shelves, a narrow cot on which to take a nap. One summer, I took that trip to visit my University of Denver creative writing teacher, William Wiser, perhaps 25 years ago. His wife was French, and while in Colorado, he lived in a tiny studio in South Denver, where he invited students to share a meal, a glass of wine. He was humble and quiet, a respected through not famous writer of literary fiction.

When he and Michelline picked me up in their “Deux Chevaux” at the train station in Cannes, I had no particular expectations of their home. Some place unassuming, I thought, unpretentious. Bill didn’t drive, and Michelline sped through the hill town of Grasse and out into the country, tearing up the dirt, as there was no pavement, not unlike the roads to my mountain home outside of Westcliffe. But there was no Westcliffe in my life then; I was a graduate student in Denver, preparing for life as a professor of English, a writer of books, a dweller of cities.

He kept telling her to slow down as the tiny tin-like car-contraption made surprising speed, and the passageways were more like paths, only one car-width wide. Michelline seemed to make no allowance for the fact that some other crazy French driver might be coming up the hill toward us.

Nevertheless, we arrived with our lives intact, and there I ran out of superlatives. Their home was spacious without being large, their furnishings tasteful, quiet, tall windows overlooking the pastoral vista we managed to survive during our hair-raising trip from town. But it was “Le Cabanon” I coveted. His space, a writer’s home away from home, though close enough to return for lunch, a cup of tea.

More truthfully, I coveted the life: a home in the country, not to mention the



French countryside, a good job teaching reasonably intelligent graduate students during a short academic year – an Edenic life for a person who just wanted to write. Still in my twenties, I did not envision such a future for me, but I gladly took the

offered model for my dreams.

In life, as in art, the end of the story doesn’t usually match the intentions of its creator.

Dutifully, I taught my students in the city of Portland, and drove for days every summer to reach my haven in the Sangres – a rented adobe in the Huérfino one summer, a custom cabin in Bear Basin for another. I parked my manual typewriter on various surfaces: a splintery picnic table, a rickety dock overlooking a cow pond, a kitchen counter with a view of hungry chipmunks devouring birdfeed around a fire ring.

Time passed.

In 2004, on my second sabbatical, my then four-year-old son and I moved into our renovated one-room cabin at 9,100 feet in the Wet Mountain Valley, ostensibly for a year. Le Cabanon did not yet exist, not even as an idea. The year became two, as I labored on an historical novel I could not stop writing. The sabbatical became an unpaid leave, and then I quit my job, so we could stay in the mountains. I sold my home in Portland; real estate in a desired urban location being what it was, I made enough to invest in yearly plumbing upgrades on the cabin, slowly replacing a system one plumber kindly called “Mickey Mouse” at best. If the water keeps running through the winter of 2011, it will be a first!

The wooden demonstration model for sale at Greenleaf Forest Products in Westcliffe had a label reading “The Chapel” on its front door. It had a loft and several tall vertical windows that opened, in addition to two elevated round ones that didn’t, and a charming front porch just big enough for a rocking chair.

My son didn’t like the froufrou

French name, and when his cousin Benjamin came to visit just after the Chapel was delivered, my nephew the stand-up comedian proposed the perfect eponym: the Benny.

No matter what we call it, the thinking cabin offers a retreat from our retreat, a space for creation or merely escape, a meditation room, an extra bed with circular views looking east and west, another kind of Cabanon, scented by sage, attended by antelope.



Annie Dawid’s third volume of fiction, **AND DARKNESS WAS UNDER HIS FEET: STORIES OF A FAMILY**, won the Litchfield Review Award for Short Fiction. It is available on amazon.com. Her story: “The Fox Breaks the Code,” won the 2008 Short Short prize on www.literal-latte.com. A former professor of English at Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Oregon, Annie is raising her son, Isaiah Max, and two dogs, Freddy and Fannie, in her cabin outside of Westcliffe at 9100 feet in the Wet Mountain Valley.

CREATIVE AND OTHER WRITERS

BOOK, MUSIC & ART
REVIEWS

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&
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in WORD doc to:
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Include name, address,
contact information & short
bio.

McCumber

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bands inevitably get tossed into the same musical catch-all with everything from the breezy acoustic funk of Jack Johnson, the psychedelic roots rock of Wilco, all the way down to the greasy tattooed bluegrass punkabilies in Split Lip Rayfield. But good music is good music no matter what you call it and Kort’s music certainly qualifies for good... no make that great.



Kort McCumber gives a breakdown of what makes Americana tick, explaining that it is equal parts folk, bluegrass, country, rock and roots music. McCumber, who has been called “The Dean” of Americana, knows, writes, plays, and sings good songs—steeped in tradition, honed over a musical lifetime, and brought to life in the present.

Playing more than a thousand live shows in Europe, Australia, and the United States in the last ten years, Kort is a classically trained pianist and cellist who also has mastered more than 12

instruments, including guitar, mandolin, banjo, harmonica, bouzouki, electric bass, upright bass, and more. Sister Beth, a classically trained violinist, plays a mean fiddle and blends her fine voice with Kort’s on many arrangements. The native Floridians and their families are now Colorado-based, with McCumber putting down roots on Lickskillet Road at the bottom of Gold Hill, Colorado.

For what promises to be a rolickin’ good time, the Cañon City Library sponsors this free Friday Concert in the Square. So, bring your blankets, chairs, and picnics and have a great time!

Cañon City Public Library celebrates National Day of the Cowboy

at 2 p.m. on Saturday, July 23,
with a visit from Mrs. Charlie Russell.

This “Meet the History Makers” Chautauqua program continues the Library’s popular series of living history presentations featuring the movers and shakers of our nation’s past.

The business manager and wife of the famed Western artist, Nancy Cooper Russell personified the old saying, “behind every great man is a great woman.” Against the backdrop of social and political reform of the early 1900s, Nancy was a woman ahead of her time. A self-taught business woman with the ability to take charge, she helped Charles M. Russell become the highest paid living artist of his time. Art historians never fail to give her credit for being the reason the world has the extraordinary

Russell paintings and sculptures that grace gallery and private collections today.

Who was this remarkable woman behind the man? Nancy shares the story of her chance meeting with the cowboy artist who would become her husband, about the world of art that celebrated the myth of the west at the beginning of the 20th century, and about the renowned artists and celebrities the Russells knew as they traveled from New York City to the growing California suburb called Hollywood.

What is Chautauqua? Begun in 1874 and popular into the early 1930s, the original form of Chautauqua brought culture in the form of concerts, orations, classes, and uplifting entertainment to communities across the United States. Chautauqua now features humanities scholars who take to the stage and breathe life into the words of historical and literary figures through interpretive characterizations.

Nancy Russell is portrayed by Mary Jane Bradbury, who appears courtesy of the Cañon City Ladies & Gents Library Association and Great Western Bank. A gifted story teller, Bradbury draws on over 20 years as an actress, speaker, educator and author to bring history to life. She is a Chautauqua speaker for the Colorado Humanities, and an Artist in Residence and performing artist for think360, formerly Young Audiences of Colorado. She is an interpreter/enactor for the Denver museum of Nature and Science, and has written and produced historic events for Four Mile History Park in Denver.

The program is free to the public. For more information, call the Library, located at 516 Macon Ave. in Cañon City, at 719-269-9020.