



MEET A MEMBER: JIM STORY

Profile written by Sheila K. Lewis

This month, member and author Jim Story tells us his story.

Hi, Jim, thanks for speaking with us. Tell us how you heard about WNBA and became a member.

While searching for an agent, I encountered Janet Reid, who informed me of an upcoming WNBA program, Query Roulette. I attended and was sold on WNBA's practical and useful approach to assisting writers. When Janet told me men were welcome to join, I signed on.

Where were you born and raised, and where do you live now?

I was born outside of Maud, Oklahoma, but spent most of my boyhood on a corporation farm in the San Joaquin Valley, fifty miles southwest of Fresno, California. I went to high school in a tiny farming community called Tranquillity (yes, with two lls), which was a twenty-five mile journey by school bus each way.

Can you tell us about your career path?

My first job was chasing birds out of a recently planted field on the corporate farm where my family and several hundred other Okies and several hundred more Chicanos worked. (As a result, I'm a lifelong supporter of the United Farm Workers of America.) Perhaps, if I live long enough and prosper well enough, I'll end my life on a small farm in Vermont so that my last job will be chasing birds out of a recently planted field. (Not really.)

Since then, I've been a college professor (Russian History), a director of New York City housing programs, a bartender, truck driver, ladies' shoe salesman, cab driver (I was terrible), temp typist, inventory taker, blues singer (the Burnt Biscuits, a group which later went into hiding), and an amateur actor (*Charley's Aunt*, *Mother Courage*, etc.).

In 2001 I retired from my position with the City of New York to write full-time. The last five years have seen several publications in literary magazines, a collection of short stories called *Love and Other Terminal Diseases*, due out soon, and the decision by a wonderfully innovative small press called Cantarabooks to publish *Wounded by History*, my novella about loss and the prat-fall politics in academic life, due out June 1, 2007.

What interests growing up helped shape your career?

My earliest ambition was to be a cartoonist. I'd read somewhere that Bob Ripley, who drew the series, "Believe It Or Not!," earned \$7,000 a week. That was, and still is, a lot of money! While still in elementary school I drew a tiger's face for the mast-head of the Tranquillity high school newspaper. It lasted more than 30 years, and may well be my most enduring achievement. I was steered in the direction of journalism when I entered high school.

My Russian history career was launched because, as a freshman in college, I wanted an 8 o'clock class to pry me out of bed early—a farm-family hangover. Russian language seemed like the only choice. I soon dropped journalism for Slavic Studies. After that, each subsequent step seemed logical enough, and that's how my long-lasting Russian history detour occurred, all the result of an 8 o'clock class.

What do you like best and what challenges you about your work?

I'm retired now, from my second career—teaching managers, owners, and even children about New York City housing—and my work is my writing. The challenges are those any writer of fiction faces: trying to get it right. For me that means developing fictional characters whose lives reflect matters I care about, and trying to tell their stories in a compelling way.

Can you describe favorite or current projects?

I have several—one involves stories from my desert farm-country boyhood, which I call *Silvercreek*. Another is a mystery, *Mirrors and Windows*, which is sometimes a mystery even to me. A third is a hefty, world-traveling, picaresque novel called *Problems of Translation*.

What do you do to stay on top of your field and grow as a writer?

I read contemporary fiction as broadly as I can. David Lodge is a favorite. I hope, for sheer pleasure, to get back to favorites novels I've already read: Nabokov's *Pnin*, Steinbeck's *Cannery Row*, and Salinger's *Franny & Zooey*.

Any spare time hobbies?

Tennis, in which I not only earned a letter but have a permanent plaque on my high school's gymnasium wall. Nowadays, however—since a shoulder and back injury—it's just watching and cheering.

Thanks, Jim, for sharing your most interesting life and fiction with such verve and color.