Commentary...

The reading life

By Jim Cornelius Editor in Chief

Sisters is getting set to celebrate the reading life. The Sisters Festival of Books runs Friday-Sunday, October 18-20.

There are few things more worthy of celebration than books and the strange and wonderful people who create them. Writing a book is a damnably difficult business, and far more books are started than are finished. Inspiration can give you a good start, but only discipline can carry you through to completion. And that's to say nothing about all the work involved in getting a book out into the hands of readers, whether you are traditionally published or are doing the work yourself.

It's a giant pain and best to be avoided, if you can. Thing is, most writers just... can't. They HAVE to write. David Joy, who is featured at this weekend's festival, described the overwhelming compulsion to get a story down on paper and out into the world: "It feels almost terminal, like if I don't get the words out then it'll be the end of me."

Well, I, for one, am grateful that these intrepid souls are so driven, for they have given me gifts beyond price.

Books made me. Reading the propulsive pulp stories of Robert E. Howard and the gritty yet romantic frontier novels of Will Henry made me say, "I want to do THAT!" and set me on the path to making my living with the pen. My brother's gift of Allan W. Eckert's historical novel "The Frontiersmen" introduced me to the Kentucky woodsranger Simon Kenton, and the Shawnee resistance leader Tecumseh. From that seed grew a lifetime of frontier studies — and my own book.

Non-readers often think that we readers aren't actually doing anything when we're reading — but they are oh so wrong. We're living a thousand lives, right there on the couch. My wife, Marilyn, once had to shout at me to get my attention while I was reading Tim Willocks' brilliant novel "The Religion," which depicts the 1565 Great Siege of Malta by the Turkish army of Suleiman the Magnificent. She laughed at me as I tore myself from

the page and stared at her blankly, like I'd just woken up from a deep slumber.

All I could tell her was that it takes some time to get back from 1565 to the 21st century. A good book does that to you. It carries you away, and returns you home changed, like Bilbo Baggins returning to The Shire from the Lonely Mountain.

As you've no doubt deduced, my tastes run heavily to blood-and-thunder — and that's true of both my fiction and non-fiction reading. My poor, dear mother early on gave up trying to elevate my barbaric tastes — and defended them when I got in trouble in sixth grade for bringing Hunter S. Thompson's "Hell's Angels" to free reading day.

Not that anybody's tastes need defending, but that blood-and-thunder section boasts some extraordinary writers. When you combine 100-proof storytelling with writing chops honed to a razor's edge, you've got something that makes the blood sing, something as

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timeless and soul-stirring as "Beowulf." Willocks has it; so do James Carlos Blake and Cormac McCarthy. And so does David Joy, who will tear himself away from his beloved forests, streams, and mountains to carry the coals of story to us right here in Sisters.

Of course there are myriad literary paths to take, and the Sisters Festival of Books offers a bunch of them. That's another wondrous thing about the reading life: Whatever your pleasure, whatever worlds you seek to explore, someone has marked trail for you, and there are mysterious legions of fellow travelers who share your love for the journey and the destination.

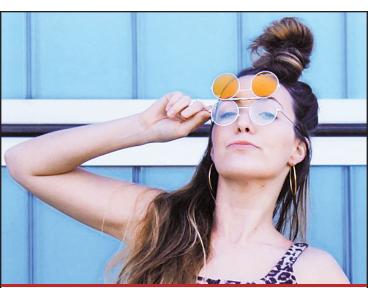
So, this weekend we gather in the Great Hall to hail the spinners of tales, the creators of worlds. We'll try not to break the mead benches.



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Sisters Middle School Sisters Festival of Books Author Readings & Presentations 9:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Author readings, presentations, signings, and a pop-up bookstore. Tickets and info at SistersFoB.com or call 541-549-0866.

Cork Cellars Live Music with Derek Michael Marc 6:30-8:30 p.m. No cover! For information call 541-549-2675 or go online to corkcellarswinebistro.com.

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Paulina Springs Books Sisters Festival of Books Family & Community Events 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Free and open to the public. Info at SistersFoB.com or call 541-549-0866.

The Belfry Biodiversity Begins with a Bee Sisters Science Club presentation by Dr. Jerry Freilich. 7 p.m. Social Hour at 6 p.m. \$5 admission. Call 541-912-0750 or go to sistersscienceclub.org.

Sisters Saloon Trivia Night 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. Sign-up is at 6:15 p.m. Free, every Tuesday! For additional information call 541-549-7427 or go to sisterssaloon.net.

Fika Sisters Coffeehouse Coffee & Connections at **Jobb** 9:30 to 10:30 a.m. Connect with remote workers & other professionals. For more info call 541-588-0311.

Sisters Saloon Poker Night 7 p.m. Every Wednesday! \$20 For information call 541-549-7427 or go to sisterssaloon.net.

Cork Cellars Tasty Thursday Hosted Wine Tasting 5 to 7 p.m. For additional information call 541-549-2675 or go online to corkcellarswinebistro.com.

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The Belfry Halloween Costume Party with Live Music 8 p.m. For information call 541-815-9122 or go to BelfryEvents.com.

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Chops Bistro Live Music with Bob Baker & Mark Barringer 6 to 8 p.m. Fiddle and guitar music. For additional information call 541-549-6015.

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Events Calendar listings are free to advertisers. Submit items by 5 p.m. Fridays to lisa@nuggetnews.com