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THURSDAY, MAY 18, 2006

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A Rule Breaker On Capitalizing Book Titles

In Plot Twist, Investor Puts His Money on Individual Projects

By BOB THOMPSON
Washington Post Staff Writer

Four o'clock tomorrow afternoon will find book publishing's annual promotional schmoozefest, Book-Expo America, in full swing. Thousands of booksellers will swarm endless aisles of publishers' displays at the Washington Convention Center. Publicists, agents and editors will gossip, network, fret about the Googleized future and anticipate the evening's dissipations.

Meanwhile, inside Room 204A, a group of (choose one) bold visionaries or deluded utopians will explain how they're trying to change the literary landscape they think a book bazaar like BEA represents.

The Literary Ventures Fund is a tiny nonprofit, founded last year with offices in Boston and New York, that "seeks to challenge the status quo of literary publishing," as its Web site boldly proclaims. LVF hopes to help exceptional works of fiction, literary nonfiction and poetry find the readership they deserve — by using an economic model more frequently associated with Silicon Valley.

"It's a wonderful idea," says Jonathan Karp, a veteran editor now running the Warner Twelve imprint of Warner Books who agreed to serve on LVF's board. "Basically they're trying to take the idea of venture capital and apply it to literary publishing — to view

See PUBLISHING, C5, Col. 1



Making rounds yesterday on Capitol Hill, immigrant advocates wore blue-and-white stickers that read: "We Are America."

BY NIKKI KAHN — THE WASHINGTON POST

An Up-the-Hill Battle

Even Without Citizenship, Immigrants Embrace a Chance to Become Activists

By DAVID MONTGOMERY
Washington Post Staff Writer

Seven a.m., and she's selling tamales on the Baltimore streets. By 10:30, she's lobbying her congressman on Capitol Hill.

Is Alicia Villalva, who stole across the border to make money and send it home to Mexico, properly a constituent? She has been living here for nearly 20 years, without a Social Security number, without citizenship. She has never cast a vote for Rep. C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger (D-Md.), yet here she is.

They are seated face to face in his inner sanctum. He says, "I think where I am [on immigration] is where you want me to be. . . . The fact you're here in Washington today shows you're reaching out and want to tell your story."



Alicia Villalva emotionally relates her experience as an illegal immigrant.

Villalva has just finished telling four of his senior staffers her story, words in Spanish and English, tears spilling down her cheeks. How she left home at 15 because her family was starving. Survived the desert to

"help my dad," whom she didn't see again for nine years. Now, married, she has three children, who are Americans.

"The only thing we want to do is work and build the country," says

Villalva, and the Hill staffers watch her, riveted.

"You bring a very, very important aspect to the debate," says Amanda Rogers Thorpe, Ruppersberger's senior legislative assistant. "I get phone calls all the time saying, 'Deport them all right away!'"

As an undocumented worker with a fictional taxpayer ID number, does she get a voice? Should she, like hundreds of other immigrants who walked the waxed halls of Congress yesterday, have a chance to petition the government?

"I pay taxes," says Villalva. This is American.

"We Are America," say the blue-and-white stickers on the lapels of the earnest petitioners in the long,

See IMMIGRANTS, C2, Col. 1

THE TV COLUMN

Lisa de Moraes

We Watch



... So You Don't Have To

NEW YORK, May 17
Elliott Yamin got tossed from "American Idol" Wednesday night after receiving 33.06 percent of the more than 50 million votes cast Tuesday night by viewers.

That leaves Taylor Hicks and Katharine McPhee still in the running; one of them copped 33.26 percent of the votes and the other 33.68 percent, according to show host Ryan Seacrest.

But, tease that he is, Seacrest didn't tell us which was which. (Smart money is on Taylor to win.)

Poor Elliott had to wait one solid hour to learn his fate on the live results show so that viewers could be subjected to Hugh Jackman and Rebecca Romijn raving about how much they loved the three

See TV COLUMN, C7, Col. 3

The Alligator Is Not a Man-Eater — Unless, of Course, It's Feeling Hungry

By KEN RINGLE
Special to The Washington Post

Nature, it should be pointed out, always bats last. This is true even in Florida, where, as novelist Carl Hiaasen makes clear, life is more than a little surreal, and where three people were recently attacked and killed by alligators in less than a week. Previously, 17 people had died from alligator attacks in Florida since 1948. There is no record in the United States of three fatal alligator attacks in one year, much less in one week in one state.

So something clearly is going on in Florida. Yesterday, as if to emphasize Hiaasen's point, an alligator walked through the doggy door of a woman's house in Bradenton and went for her golden re-

triever. The woman grabbed a shotgun and blazed away. The alligator escaped with a flesh wound. The neighbors heard shots and called police, who promptly cited the woman for hunting without a license.

To those whose closest acquaintance with alligators is a wallet or belt, this must sound like the Revenge of the Handbags or Wingtips Fight Back. But the truth is what's going on has more to do with an unusual intersection of drought and gator-mating season, compounded by decades of developers' repopulating the alligators' Everglades habitat with condominiums and retirees in leisure suits. Alligators don't have the brains to organize a revolution,

See GATORS, C4, Col. 1



Lara Logan, Rapid Riser

Guts and Glory for CBS's
Chief Foreign Correspondent

By HOWARD KURTZ
Washington Post Staff Writer

NEW YORK — The words erupt in machine-gun bursts as Lara Logan strafes the critics who say she and other journalists in Iraq are ignoring the signs of progress there.

"That's complete nonsense," Logan says. "I tell the American commanders all the time: When we can get in our cars and drive to the opening of a store and interview people on camera without fear of being killed, or getting everyone involved with us killed, the good-news stories will be told."

Her lilting South African voice is tinged with a fer-



BY HELAYNE SEIDMAN FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Lara Logan says she's surprised by her own success: "I'm not a performer. I don't speak in sound bites."

vor that a more polished reporter might try to hide. But the 35-year-old Logan has no interest in tamping down the passions that drove her into journalism and fueled her rapid rise to the post of CBS's chief foreign correspondent.

She dismisses criticism of Western journalists re-

See LOGAN, C3, Col. 1



THE RELIABLE SOURCE
The Shoe Must Go On: Bush's Gift to Chesney | C3

BOOK DEAL Bill Clinton to write about "citizen activism" | C5

MAGAZINES Time names Richard Stengel as its top editor | C5

KIDSPOST A look at the critterati in the movie "Over the Hedge" | C12 >>



BOOK WORLD

Unfriendly Skies

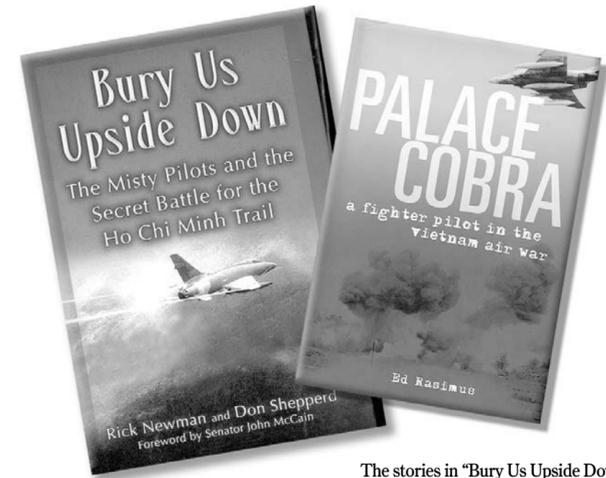
BURY US UPSIDE DOWN
The Misty Pilots and the Secret Battle for the Ho Chi Minh Trail
By Rick Newman and Don Shepperd
Presidio, 480 pp. \$29.95

PALACE COBRA
A Fighter Pilot in the Vietnam Air War
By Ed Rasmus
St. Martin's, 248 pp. \$24.95

By KIM PONDERS,
a major in the U.S. Air Force reserves and former AWACS flier who is the author of the novel "The Art of Uncontrolled Flight"

“What’s the difference between a fighter pilot and God?” goes the old joke. “God doesn’t think he’s a fighter pilot.” Wars change, but fighter pilots stay the same — young, bold, aggressive, crafty, funny, oversexed. Their stories manage to sound both daring and self-deprecating. Today’s matchless Air Force, with its combination of hyper-high-tech planes and unmanned drones, is an awesome spectacle, but the heart yearns for the stories of legend — fighters turning and jinking through torrents of anti-aircraft artillery to drop their bombs while fending off Soviet MiGs, in the days before the skies were ours.

That brings us back to Vietnam, largely remembered as a quagmire on the ground but also a gritty air war, where pilots struggled with outdated tactics, bureaucratic ineptitude and a nearly invisible enemy. The aces in the cockpits have long taken their credit, but some of the greatest flying heroes of the war carried neither bombs nor missiles. They were “fast FACs” — forward air controllers — flying F-100 fighter jets instead of old propeller-driven aircraft, buzzing the Ho Chi Minh Trail, searching for ways to stem the constant flow of North Vietnamese resources to the anticommunist south. It was hard enough avoiding ground fire



on bombing runs, but the F-100 pilots went looking for it. They flew just above the weeds, deliberately drawing out gunfire in order to mark North Vietnamese targets with smoke rockets for the fighters to bomb from safer altitudes. It wasn’t a risky mission; it was insane.

In 1967, Don Shepperd flew 58 missions with the top secret Operation Commando Sabre, dubbed “Misty” after its first commander’s favorite song. The Misty pilots were a brazen, hard-flying lot who read the jungle by dust on the treetops and trails that vanished into mountainsides. They developed a sixth sense for hidden targets and a strange affinity with the ground shooters. The North Vietnamese, who were experts with camouflage, moved at night or under the incessant cloud cover. The Mistys took staggering risks to flush them out, often returning to base with bullet holes in their fuselages — or not returning at all.

The stories in “Bury Us Upside Down” are vivid and timeless: the North Vietnamese gunner who was so inept that the Mistys had a standing order not to shoot him; the pilot who dissuaded his new commander from launching night Misty missions by taking him on a night flight and surreptitiously switching on the outboard lights over heavy ground fire; the Misty custom of igniting their afterburners over POW sites, sending out a familiar booming noise that told the downed airmen they were not forgotten. In this gripping narrative, Shepperd (now a CNN military analyst) and co-author Rick Newman (a U.S. News & World Report writer) follow the Mistys’ short, tumultuous course through the war and the long, dispiriting wait of the families at home after some of the men were captured or missing in action. Too often, a combat pilot’s story hinges upon glorified personal experiences, with little insight into the complexity of the war. But “Bury Us Upside Down” unfolds in crisp vignettes and remarkable detail, from

the 1968 Tet Offensive to the peace negotiations that left so many MIA families dejected. It’s a fabulous read.

In 1972, two years after the Mistys were disbanded, their mission adopted by better-equipped F-4 Phantom fighters, Ed Rasmus returned to Vietnam for his second tour of duty, this time flying F-4s out of Korat, Thailand. “Palace Cobra” picks up where his first book, “When Thunder Rolled” (a memoir about flying F-105s), left off. The result may be the best comparison of F-4 and F-105 performance and tactics ever written, but laymen not versed in Air Force jargon may find themselves overwhelmed.

In Vietnam, Rasmus makes clear, there were no precision-guided weapons, no night-vision goggles, none of the gadgets indispensable to air combat today — but they all began there. Vietnam was a sort of tooth-cutting for the modern Air Force. The prestigious USAF Weapons School at Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada was busy developing aggressive tactics that stateside fighter-training wings refused to adopt. Their generals feared increased accidents; after all, accidents cost promotions. So staff officers in Vietnam were still advocating conservative, tight-turn tactics against Soviet-built MiGs long after the USAF Weapons School had discredited them. This had a Darwinian effect; often, it was the most wild, rule-breaking pilots who survived.

Rasmus’s story reads as though it happened yesterday, with all the fear, bravado and frustration of combat but none of the reflection one might have expected after 30 years. That’s too bad. Rasmus’s passion for the cockpit comes through, but his memoir lacks the resonance of an earlier generation of pilot-writers. (Ernest K. Gann’s “Fate Is the Hunter” and Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s “Flight to Arras” come to mind.) Alas, with Vietnam, we’ll have to be satisfied for now with hair-raising tactics and swooning binges at the officers’ club bar.

Bill Clinton Lands New Book Deal With Knopf

By BOB THOMPSON
Washington Post Staff Writer

Bill Clinton has a new book deal, with a target publication date of late 2007 or early 2008 — just in time to have him out promoting his work as the 2008 presidential race heats up.

The former president will write not about himself this time, but about “citizen activism and service,” his publisher, Alfred A. Knopf, announced yesterday. Knopf published Clinton’s memoir, “My Life,” in 2004. That book went on to sell 2.2 million copies in hardcover.

Financial terms of the new deal were not released, though one knowledgeable publishing veteran, who asked not to be quoted on the record, suggested that Clinton likely got a “low to mid-seven-figure” advance. The advance for “My Life” has been reported as between \$10 million and \$12 million, though that estimate has never been confirmed.

Washington attorney Robert Barnett, who represented Clinton in negotiations with Knopf, said that the former president’s book will do three things: describe some of the “remarkable work” in which he has been involved through the Clinton Foundation, profile some of the “amazing people” he has met in the course of that work and other travels, and give guidance to his readers as to “how they can get involved and make a difference.”

Clinton will write the as-yet-untitled book himself, Barnett said. No decisions have been made about specific projects or individuals to be included, he said, but the topics discussed have included religious and racial reconciliation, empowering women, the environment and global warming, and improving health care.

The book was not shopped to other publishers, Barnett said, because Clinton was happy with his relationships with Robert Gottlieb, his editor on “My Life,” and with Knopf chairman Sonny Mehta.

“Right now on the global stage, there are few leaders as commanding as Clinton,” said Knopf senior vice president Paul Bogaards. “He still has an ability to inspire.”

A Venture Capitalist’s Read on the Publishing Business

PUBLISHING, From C1

books as individual enterprises that would benefit from special attention.

“It’s a courageous venture and we’ll see how it goes,” says publisher Jonathan Galassi of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, which recently negotiated LVF investments in two of its upcoming titles. “I don’t really know of any other projects quite like it.”

Here’s how it’s supposed to work: LVF invests in books it believes to have both literary merit and commercial potential that might go unrealized without an added push. So far, its investments (there have been fewer than 10 to date) have been made in partnership with the books’ publishers, though it plans to work directly with authors as well. The extra money, along with LVF’s connections and expertise, can be employed in many ways, with the most obvious being increased marketing to help a book cut through the noise of a crowded marketplace.

If its investment pays off, LVF will take a cut of the book’s profits. If it doesn’t — like a venture capitalist funding a high-tech startup — it will swallow the loss.

“Publishing is a ridiculous model and we’re trying to fix it,” says the fund’s executive director, Jeffrey Lependorf. “Not that we think we can single-handedly change the way all publishing works.”

Well, no. But you have to give LVF credit for chutzpah.

Its initial investment pool is \$250,000. With this, it is trying to influence a blockbuster-obsessed enterprise willing to throw that much cash at a single crock of chick lit by a teenage Harvard plagiarist — not to mention 34 times as much at a book by Alan Greenspan, that well known Washington literateur.

“Everyone who I talked to felt passionate about what they’re doing,” Jim Bildner says. “Everyone who I talked to felt despair over the economic world around them and what was happening to literature.”

Bildner, the chairman and founder of LVF, is also the source, so far, of 100 percent of its cash. Over sandwiches at his office on Boston’s Rowes Wharf, he recalled the conversations he had with people in publishing as he was doing his “due diligence” before launching his new enterprise.

The idea for LVF, he says, grew out of a midlife shift fueled by tragedy.

Bildner grew up in a family that owned a New Jersey-based chain of supermarkets and went on to build a couple of businesses of his own. A few years ago, he discovered that his college-age son, Peter, had a heroin addiction that eventually would kill him.

Shaken, Bildner decided that “the last thing the world needs is another person who’s spending all their time and energy creating new widgets.” He enrolled in a creative writing program at Cambridge’s Lesley University, where he was told: “Write from your heart.” Out poured the story of Peter and his family’s failed efforts to help him.

It was a difficult time, obviously, yet Bildner found himself moved by the talent and passion of the writers he was meeting. Then Lesley convened a publishing panel to offer words of industry wisdom — and he found himself listening to “five of the most arrogant folks I’d ever met” explain to him and his fellow students that they’d be lucky if an editor at a major publishing house ever so much as looked at their stuff.

Appalled, he began talking about starting an independent publishing company that would treat writers differently. A little research convinced him that the world had too many struggling independents already. He’d be better off investing in individual projects,



Ande Zellman and Jim Bildner of Literary Ventures Fund, which invests in individual books.

he decided, catalyzing literary efforts without replicating the infrastructure that was already in place.

The goal would be to “help more things faster, with lower dollars.” But the venture-capital model was important to him for another reason as well. If the fund worked, it would be “sustainable.” Not every investment would pay off, but enough would so that its pool of capital would replenish itself — and LVF wouldn’t have to deal with “donor fatigue.”

One of the first people Bildner talked to was Lependorf, who headed the Council of Literary Magazines and Presses, a nonprofit that offers technical assistance to independent publishers. Lependorf was excited enough that eventually his organization merged with Bildner’s. Ande Zellman, a magazine editor turned consultant, came aboard as editorial director to complete the LVF team.

As the due-diligence phase continued, Bildner and company went to see Amanda Urban of International Creative Management, one of the best-known agents in publishing. Zellman saw this as a reality check: If someone like Urban thought LVF’s plan was silly, they’d know they were in trouble.

Urban didn’t. “Promotional dollars are really tight,” she says, and for many books, \$10,000 or \$20,000 in additional marketing money can make a significant difference. So “anybody who wants to come along and amplify dollars is fine by me.”

Not everyone jumped at the LVF scheme.

Some publishers told Bildner in essence: Nice idea, but we won’t be doing deals with you. Enough responded positively, however, for him to recruit a varied list of publishing names to the LVF board. Among them were Karp, National Book Foundation Executive Director Harold Augenbraum and novelist Heidi Julavits, who edits the literary magazine the Believer. Others, including authors Susan Orlean and Tobias Wolff, signed on less formally as advisers.

In February, the fund announced its first round of investments. Sums of \$10,000 or so (LVF did not release specific amounts) went to support small-press books such as Elias Khoury’s much lauded Palestinian novel “Gates of the Sun,” published in translation by Archipelago Books; Sam Savage’s “Firm, Adventures of a Metropolitan Lowlife,” from Coffee House Press; and Lynne Tillman’s fifth novel, “American Genius: A Comedy,” which Soft Skull Press will publish in October.

How the money will be applied gets decided jointly on a case-by-case basis.

Tillman is “a perfect person for us,” Zellman says. She’s a writer highly regarded by her peers (“Lynne Tillman has always been a hero of mine,” novelist Jonathan Safran Foer writes) who remains little known to the reading public and in whom major publishers appear to have lost interest.

She isn’t complaining, Tillman herself says. Everything she’s ever written has been published somewhere, and she has no illusions about turning into the kind of writer

millions of Dan Brown readers might adopt. Still, she wishes more readers who would like her knew she existed.

And she’s grateful to LVF for trying to make that connection on her behalf.

But wait. There’s something funny going on here. What the Literary Ventures Fund seems to be all about is selecting worthwhile books, then trying to make a profit by calling them to readers’ attention.

Isn’t that what publishers are supposed to be doing?

“That’s exactly what we do,” says Soft Skull publisher Richard Nash — except that tiny presses like his, which care about the Lynne Tillmans of the world, often lack the resources to publish them right. “It’s not always about the marketing budget, but money being money, it can do certain things,” Nash says.

What about the big boys, the ones who do have resources? Short answer: They’re after bestsellers, and they can’t be bothered. (Alternate short answer: They’re too busy suing Google for copyright infringement.)

Most major publishers are now owned by multimedia companies, Urban explains, which bought them on the assumption that “synergy between the publishing arm and everything else” would lead to double-digit profit margins. Much unhappiness resulted when these companies discovered that “single digits is pretty much what publishing does.” Every year brings more pressure on the publishing subsidiaries to increase profitability.

Placing bets on modest, risky literary projects is not usually the way they respond.

Farrar, Straus & Giroux is a bit of an exception. Owned by the giant German holding company Holtzbrinck, it nonetheless remains one of the major publishers most committed to literature. The two FSG books that LVF is backing are “The Savage Detectives,” a prize-winning novel in translation by the late Chilean writer Roberto Bolaño, and Gregoire Boullier’s memoir “The Mystery Guest,” translated from the French by FSG editor Lorin Stein.

“The idea is that we will try some innovative techniques” in marketing the Boullier, FSG publisher Galassi says. He doesn’t actually need LVF — unlike a smaller press, he’s got access to capital if he really wants it — but he’s happy to share the risk. Translated works are almost always a hard sell to American readers and he’d have been reluctant to commit \$10,000 of FSG’s own dollars to that effort.

The gently skeptical bottom line? LVF has taken “an optimist’s approach to a very realistic business,” Galassi says.

So is Jim Bildner just a crackpot idealist, throwing his money away on the kind of books nobody really wants and hard-nosed businesspeople won’t go near? Doesn’t everybody know by now that literature doesn’t sell?

Not so fast, George Gendron says. Bildner is an entrepreneur — and entrepreneurs think differently from you and me.

Gendron, a longtime editor of Inc. magazine who now heads the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center at Clark University, joined the LVF board at Bildner’s request. To an entrepreneur, he says, what might appear to others to be “inefficient and ineffective parts of the market look like opportunities.”

What if you found 15,000 readers for a book expected to have only 5,000? What if you did that over and over again? What if others in publishing started following your lead?

“I wish there were 10 more organizations like the Literary Ventures Fund,” says Warner’s Karp. “It’s a complete win-win situation if this thing works.”

Time Names Editor Who’ll Seek ‘Stronger Point of View’

By HOWARD KURTZ
Washington Post Staff Writer

A former Time editor and writer who became a speechwriter for onetime Democratic presidential candidate Bill Bradley was named to the magazine’s top job yesterday.

Richard Stengel, who has run Time’s national and culture departments and was editor of its Web site, said he won the managing editor’s job in part because he was approached late in the selection process, making him “like the new girl at the dance.”

Stengel succeeds Jim Kelly, who was promoted to the corporate job of Time Inc.’s managing editor by John Huey, who oversees all the company’s magazines as editor in chief.

Stengel, 51, said that he sees Time, the top-selling newsmagazine, as “a guide through the media chaos” and that he hopes to hire and develop more “star writers” in the mold of columnist Joe Klein. As a “writer’s editor,” he said, “I’d like us to have a stronger point of view about things.”



Richard Stengel hopes to hire more “star writers.”

Stengel, who played on the 1975 Princeton basketball team that won the National Invitational Tournament — though not, he admits, as a starter — said Bradley was “my idol from the time I was 9 years old” and that he was not a Democratic partisan. He described himself as “a flaming moderate.”

Stengel said he never expected to become managing editor because of Time’s “fairly hierarchical structure,” but that once he began discussions with Huey, it was clear that “we saw things in a similar way.” He said Time, like other publications, must figure out how to make money with a leaner staff.

Stengel did three different stints at Time, beginning in 1981. After one of his departures in 1993, Stengel, who is married to Mary Pfaff, a South African, collaborated with Nelson Mandela on his autobiography.

Since 2004, Stengel has been president of the National Constitution Center, a museum and think tank in Philadelphia. He has written for the New York Times, New Yorker and New Republic and is also the author of “You’re Too Kind: A Brief History of Flattery.”