

SLWG Spotlight: *We're pleased to present...*

## **Betty Burnett**



**Editor, Author, Columnist, Ghost Writer**

**SLWG Member Since 2006**

Say you have a game board and dice or a spinner to tell you how many spaces to move and in which direction. The game is called Careers or Life or What Are You Going to Do Next Week? Or simply Freelancing. Every square I've landed on so far has brought me a new adventure.

I started writing for hire about 30 years ago. My book reviews morphed into a book column for the *Riverfront Times*, became feature writing for a half-dozen periodicals, and turned into commissioned books and ghostwriting assignments.

For the most part, I've lived on assignments. I've initiated a few projects, but they were only modestly successful. Marketing and promotion are so far out of my comfort zone they are in the next galaxy, where it's 300 degrees below zero and there's no oxygen.

I'm too realistic to be romantic about writing as a career. I think of it as akin to construction. People say to me, "You're a writer? How exciting!" Exciting isn't the right word. Satisfying, definitely. Sometimes it's as sweaty as putting up drywall during the summer. Sometimes the whole framework has to be pulled down while a new blueprint is designed.



Between 30 years ago and now, I had a go-to-the-office job for almost twenty years, as editorial director of the Patrice Press. Midwifing books has been one of the great joys of my life. Patrice Press was a small, regional publisher, the kind of low-key outfit I like. We weren't tied to "Blockbuster or Bust!" Some of our local authors were Frances Stadler, Elaine Viets, Harper Barnes, Clarissa Start, Sue Schneider, Duncan Bauman, Mary Kimbrough, Bob Schaeffer, Nini Harris, and the director of the press, Gregory Franzwa. One of my favorite Patrice editing jobs was putting together *The Flood of '93: Tales from a Midwestern Disaster*.

We used reportage from the entire Midwest, not just St. Louis. It was even reviewed on NPR!

## Miscellaneous Information

### My two favorite research assignments:

A biography of Howard Chandler Christy, a popular illustrator in the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (For his gallery)

*The Trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg* (for middle school)

### My most challenging assignment:

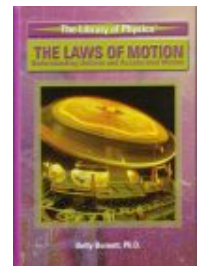
*The Continental Congress* for “nonreaders,” kids who could care less about history. Explain the Stamp Act? ZZZZZZZZ.

### The book I wrote that I like best:

*Coping with Multiple Sclerosis*

### The worst book I ever slogged through:

*Newtonian Physics: The Laws of Motion*. Six rewrites! In next place is *Movies about Mad Scientists*, which should have been fun, but the editor and I had totally different ideas about it. He wanted me to go way back to Lon Chaney; I wanted to do current mad techno-scientists, as Syndrome in *The Incredibles*. We were able to agree on *Jurassic Park*.



### My most frustrating assignments:

Two coffee-table books, one promoting St. Louis and one promoting Missouri. Frustrating because I did a great deal of research, worked hard at the writing, yet I know that everyone looks at the pictures and no one reads the text. I could have written yada-yada-yada and no one would have noticed.

### Books I've written that haven't been published:

Three meandering YA novels (what? you need a plot?)

One adult novel that's still in circulation

### Why I'm an "award-winning author":

My *Inside Delta Force* book won a VOYA award from the American Library Association in 2002, along with a whole passel of books on fighting terrorism. This still makes me laugh because I am hardly pro-military. No one from the army could give me any information, incidentally, because they insisted that Delta Force doesn't exist. (The navy, on the other hand, was very helpful for my *Attack on the U.S.S. Cole*.)



### The Guild in my life:

I've been a member of St. Louis Writers Guild about two years. The range of experience, expertise, and ambition in the Guild is fascinating. I think it's a great place to talk shop, get honest critiques, learn about writing fundamentals, and find markets.

### Why I live where I do:

St. Louis is my favorite place to live because it's accessible and kind. Also my spectacular grandchildren are here. The other places I've lived are: Hartford and Fairfield, Conn.; Dallas and El Paso, Texas; Kansas City and Springfield, Mo.; Chicago, Tucson, and Fort Sumner, New Mexico.

**What I hate:**

Regimentation

Monotony (e.g., doing an index)

Slow pay

**My degrees:**

B.A. in biology from SMU, M.A. in American history from MSU; Ph.D. in American Studies from SLU.

**My reading favorites:**

I like books that are event-driven, rather than character-driven, and I prefer spare prose.

Examples:

*The Greatest Thing since Sliced Bread*

*Montana 1948*

*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*

**And:**

I like helping people organize family histories. (At least half of fiction is just embellished family history.) My website for this is: [www.midwestbookservices.com](http://www.midwestbookservices.com).

**Next:**

I discovered playwriting one year ago this month and have decided that's where I want to land next on the Career board. I'm not thinking Broadway, but regional theater. Here's a sample: *Red and Brown October*.

**My email address:**

[bettyburnett@msn.com](mailto:bettyburnett@msn.com)