

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

Gerry Mandel



Writer, Musician, Photographer SLWG Member since 2005

GERRY MANDEL is a St. Louis Writers Guild Member of Distinction, who has won national and international awards within his chosen profession. "My two favorite quotes are possibly 'The Good Lord didn't promise you tomorrow,' and 'Life is what happens while you're making other plans.' To those I would add my own, 'Get on with it.'"

An Uneventful Youth

Gerry's full name is Gerald Allan Mandel. Hence the spelling of his first name, with a "G", not a "J." When criticized for the spelling, he points to jazz great Gerry Mulligan as the proper spelling. Gerry grew up in University City. His dad owned Proper Shoe Store on Cherokee Street, and his mom played piano and smoked. Gerry began taking piano lessons at the age of 8, won a Missouri State piano competition two years later, then quit practicing. He returned to the piano years later to learn how to play popular music, which eventually segued into blues and jazz.

College and Beyond

Since his grades at U. City High were so strong in math and chemistry, Gerry started engineering school at Washington U. in 1953. "I'm gonna be a chemical engineer," he claimed. Two years later he flunked Physics, had trouble with Advanced Calculus, and finally transferred to the Business School from which, after two summer sessions, he

graduated with a B.S. He also delved into song writing, even tried to peddle songs in NYC. This helped him learn how to handle rejection. He spent two years in the U.S. Army as a lieutenant on a guided missile site, protecting the steel mills of Pittsburgh. None of the enemy ever got through. Classes in literature and mythology at the U. of Pittsburgh kept his mind challenged.

Upon discharge, he spent three months languishing at home, until he read Jack Kerouac's "On the Road." A month later, he was living in a San Francisco boarding house, having driven west in his new 1960 Corvette convertible. "It was a terribly liberating time," he says. "I knew I wanted to be a beatnik, write poetry and look serious." He started writing in San Francisco, all of it bad but heartfelt. It was out there he discovered Charlie Chaplin movies, at a bar in Sausalito, a love that would become a lifetime passion.

Fast Forward

Gerry returned to St. Louis in 1961, worked in local television for four years as a writer, director and promotions manager. He then found the occupation which offered a breeding ground for his passions: writing, music, film, travel. It was advertising. He spent the next thirty years with Gardner Advertising and D'Arcy Advertising, both in St. Louis. Moving up from mere copywriter to Creative Director, he worked on accounts such as Budweiser, Busch, SWB, Progresso Soup, among many others. His work won national and international awards, all of them in a cardboard box in his garage because nobody wants to buy them on eBay.

The Writer Emerges

Science-Fiction was his big love in the late '40's and 50's: Bradbury (his favorite), Heinlein, van Vogt, Clarke. Also EC Comic books such as *Weird Science*, *Vault of Horror*, and *Mad*. He wrote short stories in high school and college, one of them published in the 1950's. Gerry left the agency business in 1995, began a freelance ad business, and made time to write: short stories, a novel, a couple of plays, and more songs. He attended the U. of Iowa Summer Writers Workshops for two summers, was co-host of a TV show on cable for four years, joined the St. Louis Writers Guild, and compiled an impressive stack of rejection notices. His novel - about Charlie Chaplin, of course - awaits a final revise. He taught writing and broadcast courses at Webster University. He produced the Chaplin Film Fest at Webster last fall, and will be teaching a class on Chaplin this fall at Washington U.'s Lifelong Learning Institute. He won second place in the SLWG short story contest in 2005. His photographs have been published in *Boulevard* and the current issue of *Big Muddy* magazine. He had a blues band for four years, which he broke up two years ago because he got tired of playing only three chords.

...And Finally

Gerry still loves to write. When he doesn't, he gets crabby. He considers writing to be a noble calling, a curse, a need, an obligation. If he had it to do all over again? "Don't ask."

Sample of Gerry's writing

See the first two chapters of Gerry's novel, [*Shadow and Substance: My Time with Charlie Chaplin*](#).